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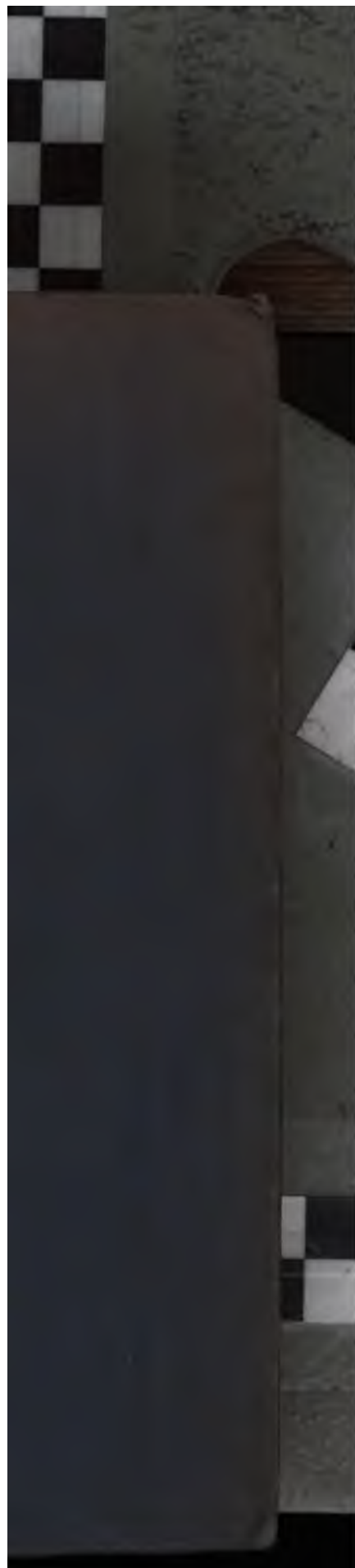
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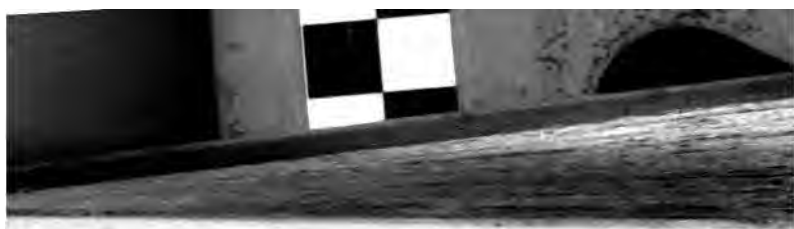
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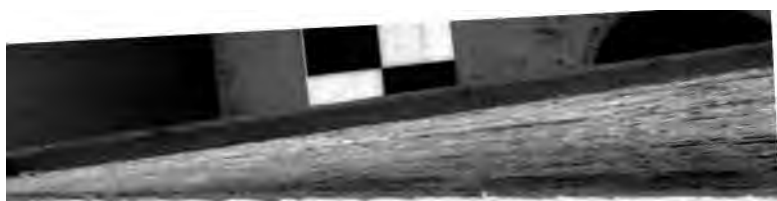


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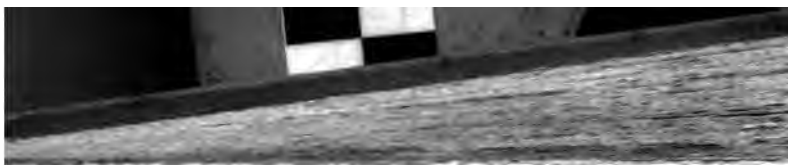


64



**STORIES OF NAPLES AND
THE CAMORRA**





STORIES OF NAPLES
AND
THE CAMORRA

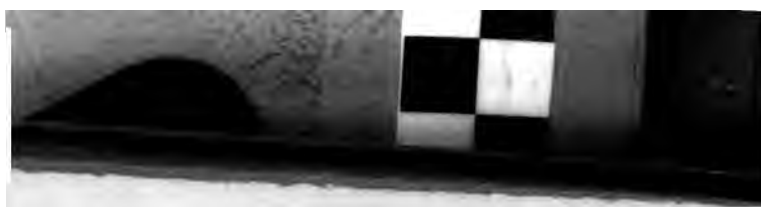
BY
CHARLES GRANT

WITH INTRODUCTORY MEMOIR OF THE AUTHOR

BY
J. B. CAPPER

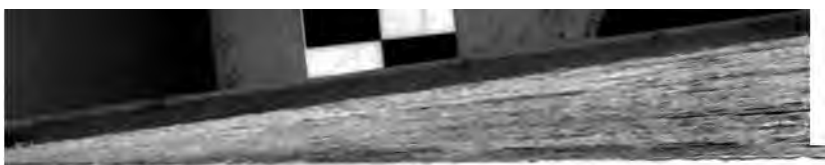
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INTRODUCTION

THE author of these striking tales was a remarkable man. It is impossible to read them without forming this opinion, and those who knew him and lament his death would, with emphasis, declare it to be just. Yet his life, though never commonplace, was an extremely simple one, marked by few incidents or outward features to form the basis of a narrative. The aim of these short pages is therefore explanatory rather than strictly biographical, to show how the stories came to be written, and how their author gained the extraordinarily exact and intimate knowledge of Neapolitan life and character which they reveal. Incidentally, perhaps, some light may be thrown on his own engaging personality, which combined great charm with no mean literary gifts.

Charles Grant was born in Hackney, on March 25th, 1841, and died at Gratz, in Styria, on July 8th, 1889. His father, who had been a merchant on the Gambia, West Africa, died in Scotland in 1848. Grant's mother, a woman of much ability, whose character exerted a strong and attractive influence upon those who came in contact with her, had been married previously to a Wesleyan missionary, who, together with his children,

died in an epidemic of fever that swept over the Gambia Settlement. His wife, too, nearly lost her life. She was supposed to be dead, and a negro was called in to take the measurement for the coffin. While the man was thus employed consciousness returned, and she exclaimed, to the negro's intense dismay, "Not yet, Sambo!" The terrified undertaker cleared the balcony at a bound and disappeared. The lady recovered and returned to England, and Mr. Grant, who was a widower and almost the only European in the colony who survived, followed and ultimately married her. They had two children, Charles and a younger sister who is still living.

The son was educated at a private school, in which he afterwards became a junior teacher; but this post he lost because, with characteristic chivalry and zeal, he took the part of certain boys who were punished, as he believed, unjustly. Soon afterwards, in 1859, partly on the advice of the Rev. F. D. Maurice, he went to Jena, where he studied at the University and supported himself by teaching and lecturing. Some of his lectures were published under the title, "The Last Hundred Years of English Literature, 1760-1860."¹ At this time, too, he laid the foundations of his profound and intimate knowledge of German literature. Literature, indeed, and art and the problems of human nature and human life were his unfailing delight, his never ending study, and to them, although his mind was in a very high degree imaginative and poetical, he devoted himself habitually with all the method, sincerity, and industry that one is accustomed to associate with the

¹ Published by Williams and Norgate.



INTRODUCTION

vii

pursuit of science. He made walking tours through a great part of Germany, Austria, and the Tyrol, mixing everywhere with the common people, living and talking with them as one of themselves, and always making friends wherever he went. His genial, kindly, sympathetic manner, and his great love of children and dumb animals made such intercourse natural and easy. About 1869 he moved to Berlin. Through all these years, and afterwards, he supported himself as best he could by teaching and by his pen, contributing to various periodicals, mostly German. He earned enough to supply his few and simple needs, to maintain his manly independence, and to satisfy the fine ideal of "plain living and high thinking." He made many friends in literary, artistic, and scientific circles both in England and abroad, and he loved to discuss with them the problems that interested him. During a part of his time in Germany, moreover, he had the companionship of his devoted sister.

Grant visited Italy for the first time in 1872. The year before, his intimate friend, Dr. Anton Dohrn, a German, had formed the plan of establishing a laboratory for the study of marine biology in Naples, and had gone thither to arrange the necessary preliminaries. His efforts were crowned with success, as indeed is well known, for the Stazione Zoologica which he founded has long been an institution of first-rate scientific importance. From the outset he was anxious that Grant should join him, and when the way had been sufficiently cleared his invitation was accepted, and the two men set up a bachelor establishment in common, in modest private lodgings. Grant came gladly. After years of



hard work, in which his craving for purely literary pursuits, and above all for poetical and imaginative effort, had found but scanty satisfaction, the prospect of greater leisure, in congenial surroundings, and the opportunity of becoming acquainted with a fascinating country under conditions wholly different from those of the ordinary traveller, were viewed with joy. Grant's presence was both a pleasure and a benefit to his active friend, while Dohrn's experience as inventor, founder, builder and manager of the Zoological Station, bringing him, as it did, into contact with Neapolitans of all classes, afforded Grant rare and unusual glimpses into Italian life, habits, character, sentiment, and modes of thought.

Italy threw her spell over him at once. It was enduring and irresistible, and constantly drew him back when he left her. It inspired most of his writings, and especially his poems, of which but a small part has appeared before the world. He yielded to it the more easily because his heart and imagination clung to Catholicism, to which, though he never joined the Roman Church, his sympathies had turned from an early age. It was not creed or dogma that attracted him, but rather a heartfelt interest in the nationalities that had not followed the Reformation, but had developed in all that touched their emotional life under the influence of Catholicism. The superstitions of the common folk, their ideas of the hereafter, of Hell, Purgatory and Paradise, the part which the Virgin and the Saints played in their lives—all these things appealed to him powerfully, as any reader of these stories will see. He was for ever



INTRODUCTION

ix

bringing the doings of the people around him into living relation with their beliefs, and his interest would centre on questions from which most Protestants turn away with aversion or contempt. He was always ready to defend "Popery," when its influence upon the Neapolitan lower classes was discussed in his presence. It seemed to him not merely rational, but indispensable—the only appropriate form of religion for Italians. His early sympathies were greatly strengthened by the persecution Catholics suffered from the *Kulturkampf*, which was beginning before he left Berlin, and in which he took a great interest, his natural inclinations always inducing him to take the part of any whom he believed to be oppressed. He was, moreover, fond of conversing with Catholic priests, and made a point of calling on them in any place where he stayed.

Besides these ties to Italy, Grant soon had personal reasons for preferring to live in Naples rather than elsewhere. Among the circle of Dr. Dohrn's acquaintance in that city, there was a family, partly Russian and partly Polish, with whom his friend also soon became intimate. The father—his Excellency G. de Baranowski—had been Governor successively of two of the largest provinces of Eastern Russia, Orenburg and Saratov, where he took an active and influential part in the reforms which put an end to the serfdom of the Russian peasantry. But in 1863, incidents having occurred in connection with the insurrection in Poland which affected very closely his Polish wife and her relations, he felt it impossible to continue in the service of the State. He therefore retired and took his family abroad. On the com-



pletion of the Suez Canal, in 1869, he was entrusted with the organisation of a new Russian line of steamships to India and China, and his wife, with her two daughters, took a house in Naples. The girls, who were still in their teens, had literary tastes and a sound knowledge of English. They welcomed Grant's society, and began, under his guidance, to study Shakespeare and English literature generally. In the spring of 1873, the elder Miss de Baranowski, Mary by name, became engaged to Dr. Dohrn, and it was no secret that Grant had formed an attachment to Helen, the younger, though he had a presentiment that she was too fragile a being for marriage to become possible. To her he dedicated his "Studies in Verse," a slim volume of poems, which appeared in 1875,¹ when Helen de Baranowski was but seventeen, and he was himself just double her age. It was she who governed his heart and filled his thoughts during the two years that followed. Her death, which occurred in 1877, while Grant was absent from Naples, was a severe shock. For a time he was completely prostrated and he never quite recovered his former vigour. He mourned for her unceasingly throughout the remainder of his life. It is easy to conjecture what was in his mind when he wrote the following exquisite lines, published in the little book just mentioned :—

"I would not have you love me, dear,
I am too sad and old ;
My brightest hope is half a fear,
My warmest kiss is cold, my dear,
My warmest kiss is cold.

¹ London, John Pearson.



INTRODUCTION

xi

I only ask to love you, dear,
And do whate'er you will,
I cannot choose, but year by year
Must love and love you still, my dear,
Must love and love you still."

By the middle of 1874 Dohrn and Miss de Baranowski were married, and in the autumn they returned to Naples and took up their abode in the lodgings which had till then been occupied by the two friends. Grant lived with the newly-married couple during this and the following year, pursuing his literary work and his study of Neapolitan life. Like most carefully educated Slavs, Madame Dohrn spoke several European languages, and she soon mastered the local dialect, so that she was able to act as interpreter for Grant whenever he was uncertain as to the meaning of acts that he saw or words that he heard. She came into daily contact with the people employed by her husband at the laboratory as well as those engaged in domestic service about the house. She took a lively interest in all that concerned the families of those she knew among the lower classes, and she fell into the habit of collecting any items of information that would be likely to interest her friend. Grant, at the same time, lost no opportunity of acquiring similar knowledge for himself. His pen was employed, and he was happy. In one of his letters to me about this time—before the great sorrow had befallen him—he wrote :—

" Perhaps the lives of others generally appear to us less hum-drum than our own. Mine has of late years been very nearly what I wish it to be. But I do not



think it would satisfy you, or perhaps any one but myself. I have learned not to wish for many things, and what I wish most I have—life in Italy with my two most intimate friends.”

Madame Dohrn, to whom I am indebted for most of the information as to his life in Naples, gives a graphic account of the industry and thoroughness with which he gathered his materials from the life around him. No discomfort or fatigue, she says, deterred him from seeking personal intercourse with the lower classes in their narrow homes, or in by-ways and lanes still narrower. He would brave the odours of oil-fried vegetables and fish in taverns of the humbler sort, and sit quietly through the din of screaming children and scolding women, mingled with the curses of the men as they gambled over pitchers of Italian wine. He would come again and again, ordering some simple refreshment, till the landlady, regarding him as a harmless guest, would talk to him of her children, her joys and troubles, her husband's earnings and prospects, the opinions of her family and kinsfolk concerning politics, the *Governo*, the King and Queen and the past and present of Naples, their experiences compared with those of the older members of the family, who remembered other times, and still reckoned in *grani* and *tornesi*, though *soldi* and *lire* were paid. Many things that were not said were guessed by Grant, for he acquired a knowledge of emotions and sentiments as expressed by gestures that enabled him to understand a good deal more than met the ear. His kind face and gentle ways invariably drew the children round him, and they became familiar and talked freely



INTRODUCTION

xiii

with him. Very chivalrous and respectful towards the women, old and young alike, he never incurred the suspicions to which Italian husbands and fathers are prone, and they appreciated his natural delicacy and tact. With their innate sensitiveness and quickness of perception, these southerners soon found out that Grant regarded them with other eyes than the ordinary tourist, who brought them money, indeed, but made little effort to hide his feeling of superiority, and too often laughed at their creed and superstitions. On the foundation of knowledge thus patiently acquired, Grant's imagination freely worked, constructing scenes and episodes of life-like truth. And thus, in the intervals of other occupation, while poems were produced and his views on politics or literature still found expression, stories and sketches such as those now published were cast into shape. Speaking to me once of his interest in, and liking for, the common people in various places, he added with something like enthusiasm, "But I love no people like the Neapolitans."

The origin of the tales included in the present volume is explained in a letter written by the author in the summer of 1882. The remarks which it contains regarding "Gabriele" are equally true of all the other stories.

"Two years ago," he says, "my friend Mr. Karl Hildebrand, urged me to write an article upon the moral and social condition of the lower classes in Naples, a subject which had long interested me, and with which a residence of nearly seven years in that city and its neighbourhood had enabled me to become familiar. I found, however, that the things which I

chiefly wished to say on the subject could hardly be put in an argumentative form. What I wanted to do was neither to explain the faults of the South Italians, nor to suggest any plan for their improvement, but simply to give a picture of the way in which they live and act, think and feel. In a word, it was the psychological problem that interested me. I therefore found it necessary to abandon the form I had originally contemplated, and instead of an article, I have written a series of sketches, one of which, 'Peppiniello,' you may possibly have seen, as it appeared in the *Cornhill Magazine* for last April.

"You will see from this outline of my plan that it must be my object to preserve the strictest fidelity to nature, and in 'Gabriele' . . . there is at least a conscientious endeavour to do this. It is not a fancy sketch, but a careful study from life, and several of the most romantic incidents are events which have really happened within my own knowledge or that of my friends.

"If you are kind enough to take the trouble of reading the story, you will see that it is complete in itself, that it does not even suggest a continuation. Yet it is, as I have said, one of a series, in each of which I have endeavoured to treat a single phase of Neapolitan life. Several of the characters in this piece reappear in later ones, and the events here recorded are there alluded to. I have at present no intention of allowing most of these pieces to appear separately, but I hope to be able to execute my whole plan by the end of the year."

"Peppiniello" is the only one of the four tales



INTRODUCTION

xv

that has previously been published.¹ A small fragment of "Gabriele" appeared, I am told, in some German paper during the author's last illness, but neither that story as a whole nor any portion of the two later ones, "Don Antonio" and "Domenico," which depict the Camorra and its inner working with a vividness and a sureness of touch that are astonishing, has ever before been printed. Surprising as it may seem that an outsider, and above all a foreigner, should have been able to penetrate so far into the secrets of this notorious society, no one who knew the man and the conscientious care with which he worked will feel inclined to question the accuracy of the drawing.

Grant made frequent excursions in Italy and beyond its borders, and in particular he spent many months at a time in Florence, where his intimate friend Adolf Hildebrand, the sculptor, lived, and where he devoted his leisure to an earnest study of Tuscan art. In the summer of 1881 he shared a villa in the outskirts of Florence with another friend, Mr. Gerald Balfour, the present Chief Secretary for Ireland. At other times he visited London, or stayed with his intimate and devoted friend, Mr. A. G. Dew-Smith, at Trinity College, Cambridge. In the autumn of 1878 he came to England on account of the failing health of his mother, to whom he was deeply attached, and he remained until after her death in the early part of 1880. During that period he established relations with the *Saturday Review*, to which thenceforth he was a frequent contributor. In particular, he

¹ Thanks are due to Messrs. Smith Elder & Co. for permission to republish it.

wrote for that paper a series of articles on the village life and customs of the people of Carinthia, marked by his habitual accuracy and insight, due to close personal knowledge of his subject. Occasional articles from his pen, on literature or foreign politics, also appeared from time to time in various reviews and magazines.

Upon his mother's death he returned once more to Italy. Afterwards he spent about twelve months at Ober Tarvis and Kronau in Carinthia, and it was then that he acquired the material for the series of articles just mentioned. In October, 1888, he went to Gratz, where he had friends, with some idea (which was not carried out) of applying for a post in connexion with the University. His health was already beginning to fail, and during the winter he became gradually worse. A kind of creeping paralysis set in, and by April his condition had become so serious that his sister went out to visit him. She found him confined to bed, unable to use his limbs, and at times suffering great pain, but bearing all with the utmost patience and sweetness of temper. The end came early in July.

To give an exhaustive list of Grant's published writings would be beyond the scope of this brief memoir, but mention ought perhaps to be made of "The Charm and the Curse: a Tale dramatised from the Edda," which preceded the "Studies in Verse," and was, I believe, his first serious effort in dramatic poetry. There is much else that one would gladly say, if this were the appropriate place. Something, I hope, of the character of the man will be discernible in the preceding pages, meagre and inadequate as of necessity they are. Still more will be revealed in



INTRODUCTION

xvii

those that follow. But only his intimate friends can fully know the strength and richness of mind, the largeness of heart, the playful delicacy, the simplicity, the perfect sincerity which distinguished him, the wholesome breadth of his views, the luminousness of his criticisms. I have quoted already one of his shorter poems. I will conclude with another, because it seems to me to strike the keynote of his existence. It is entitled "The Poem of Life" :—

" Ere a babe is born to its bliss or harm
God takes the naked soul on his arm,
And whispers a great word in its ear,
So that it cannot choose but hear.
In whatever land that babe shall grow,
Whether the world will hear or no,
If he be strong, or if he be weak,
No other word his soul shall speak.
If the time be ripe, and he doth succeed,
In speaking the word in a noble deed,
With illumined fires and loud-peal'd bells,
We say : ' In our land a hero dwells.'
If in colour or music he breathe it out,
Each soul respondeth, and none shall doubt
That this is indeed the very word
Which before his birth from God he heard.
But, alas ! our human tongues are slow,
And the world is fill'd with the noise of woe,
And seldom amid the din is heard
Clearly and loudly God's own word.
But when each soul shall fully speak
In its own accent, strong or weak,
The discord shall melt into music sweet,
And the poem of God shall be complete."

J. B. CAPPER.

LONDON, *October*, 1896.

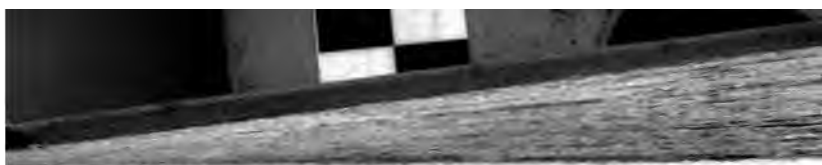




CONTENTS

	PAGE
PEPPINIELLO	I
GABRIELE	34
DON ANTONIO	178
DOMENICO	230





STORIES OF NAPLES AND THE CAMORRA

PEPPINIELLO

I

IF you have ever sauntered along the Strada del Molo at Naples, you can hardly have failed to notice the *mozzonari* who gather there in greater numbers than in any other part of the city. You frequently catch sight of a single *mozzonare* in other places, it is true—lounging on the steps of a church, it may be, or basking in the hottest corner of a piazza ; but here is the great centre of the trade in old cigar ends, and here its “merchants most do congregate” —as ragged, dirty, and unkempt a set of little beggar-boys as any European city can show. Each has his stock-in-trade spread out before him on the sheet of an old newspaper, and carefully divided into little heaps of eight or nine ends apiece. The lots have been carefully selected according to the quality of the cigars of which they are composed, and cost one soldo each ; for the *mozzonari* are almost the only Neapolitan traders who have really fixed prices, and with whom it is useless to bargain, though even they stoop to human weakness in so far as to keep a

B



2 STORIES OF NAPLES AND THE CAMORRA

general heap from which each purchaser is allowed to select a stump.

Perhaps you may wonder who can be found to buy such nasty rubbish. Wait a minute or two, and you will see.

But first fix your eyes on the boy who lounges at the corner of the road leading down to the custom-house and the landing-place. His name is Peppiniello, and he is about twelve years old. Judging from his face you might fancy him older, it wears in its moments of rest so astute and self-reliant an expression ; but if you looked at his body you would think him at least a year or two younger, for a scanty diet has checked his growth. Otherwise his limbs are not ill-formed. If you watch him while bathing in the dirty waters of the harbour, you will be amazed at their suppleness and activity, and also at their leanness. He seems to consist of nothing but skin and bone. "The wonder is," as an Italian shopkeeper once remarked to me, "that there should be so much life in so little flesh!" The whole of his skin is of one colour, a deep grayish-brown ; there is not blood enough in the veins to lend it the warmer tint that the Venetian painters loved. The upper part of the face is well formed, and the eyes are very bright and intelligent ; the mouth, however, is not only too large, but there is a precocious trait about it of something which generally appears to be merely humour, but at times looks unpleasantly like cunning. Still it is, at the worst, a quick, cheerful, not unkindly face, and it would look far better if the hair were not shorn so closely to the head. In dress, Peppiniello does not greatly differ from his companions. His shirt is open before and torn behind ; his trousers are so full of holes that you wonder he should think it worth while to put them on at all, particularly in a town where their absence in a boy of his age would attract but little attention. He is wiser than you, however, and he



PEPPINIELLO

3

knows that in Naples it is only the children who have parents to care for them that can afford to run about in their shirts. He does not look at the nether article of his dress—at least during the summer months—as a matter either of comfort or decency, but simply as the badge of the social position he is desirous of occupying. In the same light, too, he regards the little round cap, of nearly the same colour as his skin, which seems to be made of some woollen material. I have never been daring enough to examine it closely. It is rarely to be seen upon his head, and its chief practical purpose seems to be to serve as an elbow cushion.

At present Peppiniello looks idle enough. He is stretched at full length upon the ground, watching a game which two other boys are playing with peach-stones, a natural substitute for marbles ; but he has a keen eye for business, and makes more money than any of the fraternity. This his comrades attribute to his luck ; but it is really the result of a number of small observations. Thus, more than a year and a half ago he noticed that when four or five of them sat in a row those at the two ends were sure to sell their wares quickest ; for if the purchaser is in haste he will buy of the first that he sees, and hurry on ; if he is at leisure he will probably inspect all the piles, and, finding them pretty much alike, he will take his tobacco of the last, in order that he may not have to retrace his steps. Some months passed before he made a second discovery, namely, that the spot he now occupies is the best for its purpose in all Naples, because the mechanics who pass along the Strada del Molo are generally anxious to get to or from their work as quickly as may be, while, on the other hand, the boatmen who return from the landing-place have usually finished their task, and have nothing very particular to do. As soon as he had noticed this, he made a point of occupying the corner before any of his com-

4 STORIES OF NAPLES AND THE CAMORRA

rades were astir, and he has now almost a prescriptive right to it. Some of his success must also be attributed to his good-nature. When his wares are exhausted, or there is no hope of custom, he is always ready to run an errand for the men who are working near. Sometimes he is rewarded by a crust, a slice of cabbage, or a handful of fruit, and more rarely by a centesimo or two ; but on such occasions he never asks for anything, and those whom he serves in this way naturally repay him by giving him their own custom and recommending him to their friends. In fact, he is a favourite with most of the men who are employed in the neighbourhood ; and this is useful to him in more ways than one.

Among Peppiniello's other observations is this—that during the morning hours it is useless for him to take much trouble in recommending his wares. Those who want old cigar ends will come and buy them ; but every one is then too busy to pay attention to his noise and nonsense. Later in the day it will be different—a joke may secure a customer, or a grin and a caper draw a soldo from the pocket of some foreign gentleman, and Peppiniello is as equal to these as to the other requirements of his trade. But there is a time for everything, and at present the most brilliant display of his talents would make no impression on any one but his companions, for whose applause he does not greatly care ; so he lies at his ease with the happy conviction that his own stock is the finest in this morning's market.

It consists of eleven piles, and a little heap of foreign cigar ends, which are their possessor's great joy and pride, though he is a little uncertain as to their exact market value. If a sailor of luxurious tastes and reduced means happens to pass, he will probably offer a good price for them ; but at present the boy is not anxious to sell, for he knows the unusual display will attract customers for his other wares. This special



PEPPINIELLO

5

heap is the result of a daring raid into the Grand Café, which he made the other evening, and in which his retreat was covered by a party of good-natured foreigners. When he found himself in safety, and gesticulated his thanks from the middle of the street, they threw him a soldo or two, and one of them, supposing that an infantile craving for the prohibited joys of tobacco was the cause of his boldness, added a cigar which he had only just lighted. There it lies at the top of the sheet of paper. Peppiniello is resolved not to part with it for less than eight centesimi. It must surely be worth ten, he thinks ; but, unfortunately, those who are ready to pay such a price for a cigar usually prefer to buy it in a shop.

But see, a mechanic in his working-dress pauses for a moment, lays down two soldi, sweeps up two piles, which he wraps in a piece of paper, and thrusts them into his pocket as he walks on. The whole transaction has been the work of a few seconds, and has not cost a single word. The next customer is of a very different type : he is a fisherman coming up from the landing-place to fill his morning pipe. He feels the deepest contempt and animosity for the mechanic on account of his calling ; but, at the same time, he has a firm conviction that he belongs to a class which knows how to cheat the devil, and that consequently it is by no means unadvisable for a good, simple, Christian fisherman to take a hint from it in worldly matters. He has, consequently, made up his mind as to which of the *mozsonari* he will patronise long before he reaches the first of them ; but that does not prevent him inspecting all the other papers with a critical, irresolute air. When he reaches Peppiniello, he looks at his wares with a new expression of marked contempt, pauses for half a minute, and then commences to gesticulate. To all his movements Peppiniello only replies by that slight and peculiar toss of the head which every Neapolitan accepts as

6 STORIES OF NAPLES AND THE CAMORRA

a final refusal. In fact, they have been having an animated discussion, although not a single word has been spoken ; for the common people of Naples, though ready enough with their tongues, are found of "conversing silently" with each other—not exactly as lovers are said to do, but by means of a perfect language of signs. The fisherman has offered, first three, and then four centesimi for a single lot, and then nine centesimi for two. These offers have of course been refused. He knew from the first that they would be, for any *mozzone* who was observed to increase the size of his piles, or even suspected of selling below the established price, would not only lose caste, but be subjected to constant persecution by his comrades ; but then, as a fisherman, he feels he would be outraging every feeling of propriety if he were to buy any article whatever without at least attempting to cheapen it. It would almost look as if he wished to be taken for a *signore*. At last, with a sigh, he places the exact price of a single pile—which he has all the time been holding ready—upon the paper, and then, with a most innocent expression, he stretches out his hand to the foreign tobacco at the top of the sheet. He knows that is not its price, and he does not want it, as he greatly prefers the Italian tobacco below : he only wishes to show that he is not quite a fool. Peppiniello gently pushes back his hand, draws a line with his own finger between the upper and the lower lots, and points to the latter. He is very careful not to touch the money, as that might lead to an unpleasant discussion with respect to the exact amount. The fisherman now makes as if he intended to resume it, and purchase of the next dealer ; but, as he sees Peppiniello is still unmoved, he takes instead the heap on which from the first his heart has been set, seizes the largest cigar end in the general pile, and moves off slowly till he finds an empty place on the coping on which to seat himself.



When he feels quite comfortable, he slowly takes off that peculiar piece of headgear, which young artists and enthusiastic antiquaries delight to call Phrygian, but which to the uninitiated eyes of ordinary mortals rather suggests a cross between an overgrown night-cap and a gouty stocking ; from this, after fumbling about in it for a time, he draws a red clay pipe with a cane stem, and a clasp knife, and begins to prepare for the enjoyment of a morning smoke. If you could get near enough to look into that Phrygian headdress of his, as it lies there beside him, you would probably find that it still contains a hunch of bread, half an onion, an apple, two peaches, a few small fish wrapped up in seaweed, and a picture of San Antonio ; for the fisherman's cap is not only his purse and tobacco-pouch, but a general receptacle for miscellaneous articles of his personal property. It is but just to add, however, that the fish he carries in this way is always intended for his own consumption.

II

AT ten o'clock, Peppiniello has disposed of all his wares. As the day is hot he feels almost inclined to have a swim in the harbour ; but he sees no one near with whom he could safely deposit the eleven soldi which he has made by his morning's work, and, besides, he is hungry, as well he may be, for he has been up since dawn and has eaten nothing yet. Where to get a dinner ?—that is the question ; for it never even occurs to him that he might spend a part of his hard-earned gains upon common food, though now and then, when the times are good, he will buy a slice of water-melon. He would hardly feel justified in doing even that to-day ; so, as he rolls up the foreign tobacco, which he has not sold, in the old newspaper, and places it inside the breast of his shirt,

8 STORIES OF NAPLES AND THE CAMORRA

which serves all Neapolitans of his class as a capacious pocket, he revolves in his mind the chances that are open to him. He knows he could have what he wants at once by going to the narrow street near the Porta Capuana, where his father used to live ; for there are still several women in the neighbourhood who remember his family, and who would give him a crust of bread, a slice of raw cabbage, or a part of whatever their own dinner happened to be. But he has noticed that the more rarely he comes the warmer his welcome is ; and he wishes to leave these friends as a last resource in cases of the utmost need. Though it is not the hour during which strangers are likely to be moving about, it might be worth while to saunter down to Santa Lucia, as there is no saying what a foreigner may not do, and, if he is out, that is the likeliest place to find him. But the children in that district hold together, and look upon him as an intruder on the hunting-grounds that belong by right to them. They will crowd him out of the circle, if possible, spoil his antics, and snatch the soldi out of his very hand. Nay, a few weeks ago, when he stole the purse from the English gentleman, they seemed half inclined to betray him instead of covering his retreat. It is true, that, at last, their instinctive hatred of law and the police got the better of their local jealousy, and he made his escape. In half-an-hour, when he had brought his booty into safety, he returned, and invited the boys who had helped him into a neighbouring *taverna*, where he placed four litres of wine before them. That was the right thing to do, and he did it ; nay, as the purse had contained nearly twenty lire—though that he confessed to nobody—he even added a kilo of bread to the repast. Since then he has enjoyed a half-unwilling respect in that quarter. But Peppiniello is not the boy to forget their hesitation, which seems to him the basest of treachery. Besides, their manners disgust him. It



is right enough that boys should cut capers, and make grimaces, and beg, and steal ; but it is indecent for girls of eleven or twelve to do so. If he has a contempt for anything in the world, it is for those girls and their relations. No ; he will not go to Santa Lucia.

So he turns up one of the dark narrow ways that lead away from the Porto, looking wistfully into every *taverna* that he passes. Most of them are empty. In some a single workman is sitting, with a small piece of bread and one glass of wine before him, or half-a-dozen have clubbed together to buy a loaf and a bottle. Peppiniello knows it is useless to beg of these—they have little enough to stay their own appetites. “ Ah ! ” thinks he, who, like all his class, is a bitter enemy of the present government—perhaps only because it is the government—“ it was different in good King Ferdinand’s days, when bread only cost four soldi the kilo, and wine seven centesimi the litre. Then, they say, if a hungry beggar-boy could find a workman at his dinner, he was sure of a crust and a sup ; but how can they give anything now, with bread at eight and wine at twelve soldi ? ” At last he sees what appears to be a well-dressed man, sitting at the further end of the low, dark room. He slips in in a moment, and stands before him making that movement of the forefinger and thumb to the mouth by which Neapolitan beggars express their hunger. The man cuts off a small fragment of his bread and gives it him. Now Peppiniello is near, he can see by the pinched face and bright eyes of the man that he, too, has nothing to spare. He is almost ashamed of having begged of him ; but he munches the bread as he goes along. It is such a little piece that it seems only to make him hungrier. He hardly knows what to do ; so he sits down on a doorstep to reflect.

He knows an English ship came into port last night. The chance is that some of the sailors are

ashore. If he could find them, they would very likely give him something, and he fancies he can guess pretty nearly where they are ; but then—to tell the truth—he is afraid. Such sailors, it is true, have never shown him anything but kindness ; but who knows what they may do ? They are so strong and rough, and have no respect for anything. He looks upon them as he does on the forces of nature, as something entirely capricious, incalculable, and uncontrollable. They threw him a handful of soldi the other day ; perhaps to-day they may throw him out of the window. The people say they are not even Christians. Who can tell ? Yet surely the Madonna must have power over them too ; and he is very hungry. So he rises, and turns once more in the direction of the Porto, murmuring a Paternoster and an Ave, with eyes in the meantime perfectly open to any other chance of provender.

He goes to one, two, three of the houses they are likely to frequent, and convinces himself they are not there. At last he hears them in the front room of the first story of the fourth. It is the very worst house for his purpose that they could have chosen ; for the hostess is a very—well, I know no English word which would not be degraded if applied to her. She looks upon all the money in the pockets of her guests upstairs as already her own, and naturally resents any claim upon it, however small. Peppiniello knows her well ; but he has not come thus far to be turned back at last by fear of an old woman. He saunters carelessly and yet wearily into the street, and seats himself on the step opposite the door of the *locanda*, leans his head upon his arm, and finally stretches himself at full length. Any passer would fancy him asleep ; in fact, he is on the watch. He knows his only chance is to wait till the lower room and, if possible, the kitchen behind it, are empty, and then make a dart for the staircase. He lies there for



more than half-an-hour. At last the cook is sent out to fetch something, as it seems from a distance ; for he takes his coat and hat. The hostess stands at a table at the back of the front room, with a tray of grog-glasses before her which are half full of spirits. In a moment more the scullion comes with a kettle of boiling water, which he pours into the glasses while the hostess stirs them. By some accident a drop or two falls upon her hand ; she says nothing, but simply wipes it with a cloth beside her. As soon, however, as the last glass is full, and the scullion has taken two steps away from the table, she gives him such a cuff as sends him flying to the other end of the kitchen, with the scalding water streaming down his legs. Of course there is a howl. He, at least, is not likely to take much notice of anything at present. The hostess quietly takes up the tray, puts on a bland smile, and mounts the stairs. This is Peppiniello's chance. He lets her ascend three or four steps, and then, with a spring as stealthy as a cat's, he follows her. His bare feet fall noiselessly, and he steals up so close behind her that there is no chance of her seeing him, even if she should turn, which she can hardly do, as the stairs are narrow and she has the tray in her hand. When she reaches the landing, she stops to place her burden on a table, in order that she may open the door ; Peppiniello at once springs forward, and enters without being announced, satisfied so far with his success, but by no means certain that he may not have sprung out of the frying-pan into the fire.

Round a table which is strewn with the remnants of what seems to have been a sumptuous though rather coarse meal, six sailors are seated in company not of the most respectable.

Peppiniello knows that boldness is now his only hope, for if the hostess can catch hold of him before he has attracted the men's attention he will certainly fly down the stairs much more quickly than he



12 STORIES OF NAPLES AND THE CAMORRA

ascended them. So he advances at once, and with a low bow and a grin makes the gesture that indicates his hunger.

"What does the young devil mean?" asks one of the men in very imperfect Italian.

"He only wants some of the broken bread," replies a girl, throwing him half a loaf.

Peppiniello springs into the air, catches it halfway, makes a gesture of the wildest joy, and then, with a face of preternatural gravity, bows his thanks and stands like a soldier on parade. The men are amused, and soon all the bread upon the table is stowed away within his shirt. This gives him a strange appearance, as the slender arms and legs form a striking contrast to the enormous trunk. He at once sees his advantage, and proceeds to contort his face and limbs in a way that makes him appear hardly human. Shouts of laughter follow, and one of the girls hands him a glass of wine. Meanwhile the grog has been placed on the table and the men have lighted their pipes. One pulls out an Italian cigar, but after the first whiff he throws it away with a curse, declaring that it is made of a mixture of rotten cabbage-leaves and india-rubber. Peppiniello seizes it almost before it falls, seats himself in a corner, and begins to puff away with an expression of the most luxurious enjoyment.

"What, you smoke, do you, you little imp of hell? You'd better take the whole lot of them, for I'll be d——d if any human being can smoke them."

The words are spoken in English, and Peppiniello can hardly believe his eyes when a parcel of cigars comes flying across the room into his lap.

"Ask him if his mother knows he's out," says one of the men. His companion puts the question into such Italian as he can command. One of the girls repeats it in the Neapolitan dialect, and explains Peppiniello's answer, which is then translated into



English for the benefit of the male part of the company.

"I have no mother."

"His father, then?"

"I have no father."

"How does he live, then?"

"How I can."

"Ask him if he'll come aboard with us; and tell him we'll make a man of him."

"What would my sisters do then?"

"How many sisters has he?"

"Four."

"How old?"

"One a year older and three younger than I am, and they have nobody in the world to take care of them but me."

The idea of that little monkey being the father of a family is too comic not to excite a laugh, yet there is something pathetic in it. None of the girls believe the tale; but if questioned by their companions they would all assert a firm conviction of its truth. Nay, one or two of them would probably say they were personally acquainted with all the facts of the case.

"It's all a d——d lie, of course," says another of the men; "but it don't matter," and he throws the boy a two-soldi piece. The other sailors follow his example.

Peppiniello gathers up his riches. He feels that it is time for him to withdraw, but he knows the landlady is waiting below with a stick, and that she purposes first to beat him as unmercifully as she can, then to rob him of all that has been given him, and finally to kick him into the street. He is afraid that even his morning's earnings will go with the rest of his gains. It is not a pleasant prospect. Fortunately for him the girls at the table know all this as well as he does. One of them whispers a word or two to her companion, rises, beckons slightly to the boy, and

goes downstairs. He makes a silent bow to the company and slinks after her, but when they reach the lower room she takes him by the hand and leads him to the street door amid a perfect storm of abuse from the landlady, who, however, does not venture to give any more practical expression to her rage.

"Now run, you little devil, run!"

Peppiniello only pauses for a single moment to raise the girl's hand gently to his lips, and before half a minute is past he has put a dozen corners between himself and the scene of his adventure.

But the girl turns and faces the infuriated hostess. "What harm has the boy done you?" she says quietly. "If the gentlemen upstairs had been angry I could understand it, but they were amused. What harm has he done you?"

The hostess is rather cowed by the girl's manner, and she replies in an almost whining tone, "All that bread he has robbed me of—is that nothing?"

"Why, what can you do with broken bread?"

"Sell it to the poor."

The girl's form assumes a sudden dignity; she feels that this woman has sunk far below her, and her voice is very low but very biting as she says, "Donna Estere, you are as hard and wicked as a Piedmontese. If you speak another word I will never enter your house again, but take all my friends over there," and she moves her head slightly in the direction of a rival establishment.

This is a threat that Donna Estere cannot afford to disregard, but she is still too excited to be able to fawn on the girl and flatter her as she will in half an hour's time. So she retires silently into the kitchen, to vent her rage first in abusing and then in beating the scullion.



III

WHEN Peppiniello feels himself well out of the reach of danger, he draws out a piece of bread and eats it greedily as he walks slowly in the direction of his father's old home. He has not gone far before he sees another boy of his own class seated in a doorway and dining off a raw cabbage head and two onions. Peppiniello squats himself down opposite, and by way of beginning a conversation he remarks in a friendly tone that the cabbage doesn't look very fresh. The owner of the maligned vegetable replies that he pulled it that very morning in his uncle's garden, and adds that he is sorry for boys who are obliged to dine off stale bread. This gives rise to an animated discussion, which in about five minutes leads to the exchange of a thick slice of cabbage and half an onion for a piece of bread. Each now feels that he is dining sumptuously, and in order to remove any unpleasant impression that may have been left on his neighbour's mind, he praises the provisions he has just received at least as warmly as he before disparaged them. The stranger then gives a glowing description of his uncle's garden, which, by his account, must certainly be the most remarkable estate ever possessed by a violent and eccentric old gentleman, whose only weakness is a doting fondness for his nephew. Peppiniello has his own doubts as to the existence of that earthly paradise, but he is far too polite to express any. In his turn he relates how his father went to sea a year and a half ago and was, as they thought, lost, and how they mourned for him, and how that very morning his aunt had received a letter stating that he had married a great heiress in Palermo, and was going to return to Naples in a few weeks.

"Ah, won't your stepmother just beat you!" says

the stranger, in a tone which implies that he could quite enter into the fun of the operation.

"Ah, but she can't!" replies Peppiniello. "That's the best of it. She's only one leg; the other's a wooden one, but they say it's stuffed full of good French gold pieces."

And so, having finished his meal, he proceeds upon his way, pondering upon what to do with the fortune he has so unexpectedly invented for himself. The stranger, as he saunters in the opposite direction, considers the important question whether a ferocious miser of an uncle who can refuse nothing to his single pet, or a stepmother with a wooden leg stuffed with gold pieces, is the most desirable imaginary possession for a little street-boy of limited means.

Peppiniello at last reaches a small tobacco-shop at the corner of a narrow close. "Good-day, Donna Amalia," he says as he enters.

"What, Peppiniello! you here again, and dinner's over, and I don't believe there's a bite left in the house." Her tone is rough, but she turns with the evident intention of searching her larder.

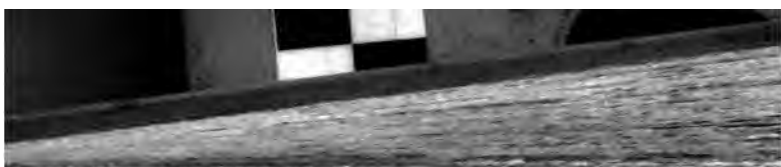
"Thank you; I've eaten to-day. I only want to ask you to take care of this for me till the evening," and he heaps the bread upon the counter.

"What, ten pieces; you *have* had luck to-day!"

"And here are some cigars. Will you sell them for me? Of course I should not expect the full price."

It goes rather against Donna Amalia's conscience to refuse any lawful profit that may fall in her way; but she remembers that the boy is an orphan, and that the Virgin has a way of rewarding those who are pitiful to such.

"Well, let me see them. Yes, they are whole. They cost, you know, eight centesimi apiece; that makes fourteen soldi and two centesimi. There it is," and she pays him the whole sum. She has no doubt in her own mind that she is receiving stolen goods,



but no one can identify a cigar, and it is no business of hers, so she asks no questions. Peppiniello puts it together with the rest, and then commits the whole to her care. She counts over the sum with him very carefully, wraps it in a piece of paper, and places it on a shelf in the inside room beside the bread. He has already bidden her good-bye, and is passing out of the shop, when she calls him back.

"You will never be able to eat all that bread while it is fresh."

"It is quite at your service, Donna Amalia ;" but there is something in the eyes that contradicts the tone and the words.

"Nay, boy, I don't want to beg your bread of you ; but look here, these three pieces are as good as when they came from the baker's. If you like, I will take them to-day, and give you new bread for them to-morrow."

"A thousand thanks, but let it be the day after to-morrow."

"Very well."

He is really grateful to the rough kind woman, but he does not kiss her hand. That one only does to people of a higher social class, and he does not feel so very much below Donna Amalia.

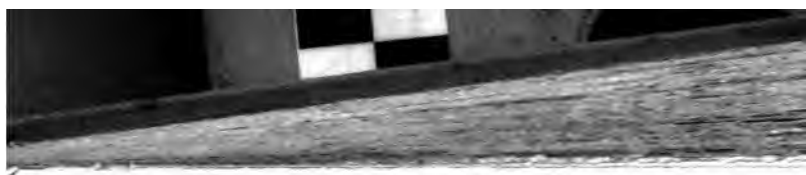
It is now more than time for the mid-day sleep, so Peppiniello retires into a doorway where the stones are pretty smooth, and there is no danger of the sunshine stealing in to waken him. He does not go to sleep so quickly as usual, perhaps because he has dined better ; and as he reviews the events of the morning he comes to the conclusion that it is his duty to go to mass next morning, to return thanks for his deliverance from danger. He has no doubt that it was the Madonna who saved him from Donna Estere, and it never occurs to him that she chose rather a strange messenger. Then he begins to consider on what numbers he had better set in this



18 STORIES OF NAPLES AND THE CAMORRA

week's *lotto*. He is rather doubtful of his luck, for he has lost six of the francs he found in the purse in that way. How he wishes he could dream of numbers, but somehow he never does. The priests of course know them all, for they are learned, but they are bound by a vow not to impart their knowledge to any one; yet they say that sometimes a monk will whisper the sacred secret to a friend. Surely they ought to do so, if only to be revenged on the government who has turned them out of their monasteries. Peppiniello resolves to be very polite to all monks in future. If he could read, he would try and get hold of one of those wonderful books which explain things so well you can hardly dream of anything without finding the number it signifies in them. Well, this time he will set upon 32, the number of Donna Estere's house, and upon 12, for there were twelve guests at table. Fate will doubtless give him another number before the time for playing comes round. Pondering these things, he falls asleep.

It is later than usual when he awakens, and he sees with some consternation how low the sun has already sunk. He has missed the best early harvest for old cigar ends, which is at its height at two o'clock, when the gentlemen who have lunched and smoked return to their places of business. He must make haste or he will have nothing for the evening market and miss that too. So he hastens off to the railway station, picking up here and there a bit of merchandise by the way. He is not lucky even there, though a good-natured porter lets him slip into the waiting room, which is empty for the moment; and on his way to the Porto, which he chooses to take through the narrow streets and not by the most frequented road, he walks slowly, as if in doubt. At last he sits down and counts over his scanty gleanings with a look that says plainly enough, "They won't do." So



he turns once more away from the Porto, and after climbing two or three streets at rather a rapid pace, he reaches the corner of one in which a poverty-stricken café is situated. Then his whole manner changes; he assumes an indolent but merry air, and begins to sing a Neapolitan song. The threadbare waiter who is sitting at the door hails him with a loud jest, and then asks in a low voice,—“Don’t you want any cigar-ends to-day?”

“Well, I hardly know. I have such a large stock, and I sell so few: but let me see them.”

They enter the empty café together, and the treasure is displayed.

“What do you want for them?”

“What will you give—four soldi?”

“Not two for that lot,” says the boy contemptuously.

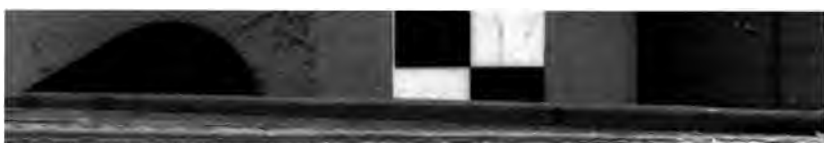
A discussion of course follows, and Peppiniello finally agrees to give two soldi, but only that he may not lose the waiter’s friendship and patronage. The tobacco he still insists is not worth the price.

“And when am I to be paid?”

“To-night, if I sell enough.”

He resumes his indolent walk and his song, which he continues till he reaches the end of the street, when he quickens his pace and leaves off singing. Both parties are rather ashamed of this transaction. The waiter knows he has been acting meanly, and the boy, who looks upon all cigar-ends as the rightful property of the *mozzonari*, feels he has been put upon. It is only in extreme cases like to-day’s that he will submit to this. In fact, this perfectly legitimate purchase, by which he is sure of making a large profit, weighs on his conscience far more heavily than any of his thefts. Hence each is sure of the other’s secrecy.

As Peppiniello turns again in the direction of the Porto, he fancies that some misfortune is sure to



20 STORIES OF NAPLES AND THE CAMORRA

overtake him shortly, for he feels he has deserved a punishment, and only hopes the avenging powers will lay it on with a light hand. So when he finds a perfect stranger to the whole company of *mozzonari*—a great hulking youth of some fifteen years—has taken possession of his place, he looks upon it as the result of their immediate interposition, but this does not make him feel any the more inclined to bear it patiently. Besides, he knows that if he gives way now his favourite seat is lost for ever. Accordingly he utters an indignant protest, which calls forth a contemptuous answer. An angry altercation follows, in which sufficiently strong language is used on both sides. A boatman passing up from the landing-place soon puts an end to the situation by first pushing the youth to a distance of some yards and then tossing his wares after him. This being done, he passes on, fully satisfied that he has been performing an act of justice, for he knows Peppiniello does usually sit there, and then his opponent is old enough to gain his living in some other way. The sale of old cigars ends is work that children can do, and so it ought to be left to them.

Peppiniello quietly takes his old seat, from which the new-comer does not venture to expel him by force—he has evidently too powerful allies; so he crouches down at a distance of a few yards in front of him, and covers him with every term of abuse. Hitherto the language, though strong, has been confined within the wide limits of what the lower class Neapolitans consider decent, or at least tolerable; now the vilest and most offensive terms which their unusually expressive dialect furnishes are freely used. At first the boy gives epithet for epithet, but then he falls silent, his eyes dilate, his lips tighten, his right hand is fumbling inside his shirt.

“You son of a priest.”

The words are scarcely uttered, when the boy's



knife is unclasped, and, with a spring as sudden and unexpected as a cat's, he has flown at his enemy's throat.

Fortunately for both, a well-dressed man has been silently watching the scene, and with a motion as quick as Peppiniello's he has seized the boy, claspings his body with his right arm and grasping the knife with his left hand. Another moment, and a hearty kick has sent the intruder sprawling upon the stones. The latter gathers up first himself and then his wares, and goes off muttering threats and curses. A single glance at his face, however, is sufficient to show that he will never venture to interfere with Peppiniello again.

"If you had ever seen the inside of a prison, my boy," says the man whose intervention has just been so opportune, "you would not run the risk of being sent there for such a foul-mouthed fool as that ; nor," he adds in a voice that none but the child in his arms can hear—"nor for a purse either, even if it did contain twenty lire ;" and so he pushes him with apparent roughness, but real gentleness, back into his place.

Peppiniello stretches himself at full length. His face is on the ground and covered by his two arms, his whole body is still quivering, but his protector sees at a glance that it is only with subsiding rage, so he passes on as if nothing particular had happened. When he returns in an hour's time the boy is jesting merrily with his comrades ; but his quick eyes catch the approaching form, he draws back into his corner, and whispers with a downbent head, "Thank you, Don Antonio."

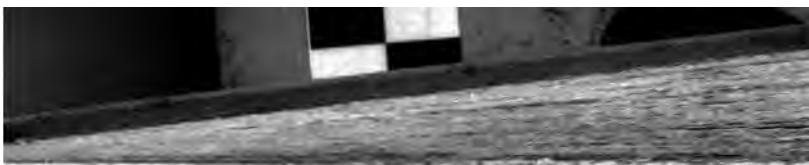
Don Antonio, if that is his name, takes no notice ; he does not even cast a passing glance at the scene of the late conflict.



22 STORIES OF NAPLES AND THE CAMORRA

IV

AT about eight o'clock, Peppiniello resolves to give up business for that evening. It is true the market is at its height, and he has not yet sold more than half his wares, but he will want a new supply to-morrow, and the best time for gathering it has now begun. To-night, too, he must make good use of his time, for he will have to return home earlier than usual, as Donna Amalia goes to bed between eleven and twelve. He turns in the direction of San Carlo, and walks slowly past the small theatres, picking up what he can by the way, till he reaches the garden gate of the palace, over which he throws a two-centesimo piece, with a hardly perceptible motion of his hand, and without turning his head. On each side stands a colossal bronze statue of a man governing an unruly horse. The Emperor Nicholas of Russia sent them as a present to King Ferdinand after his return from Italy, and they were supposed by the Italian Liberals of those days to convey a delicate hint as to what the Autocrat of the North considered the true principles of government. Of all this Peppiniello of course knows nothing; but the stalwart forms have made a deep impression on his imagination, and he has invented this strange way of paying his adoration to them. He does not number them with the saints, still less has he any intention of paying them divine honours. What he attributes to them is great, though by no means unlimited, power, and some such capricious goodwill to himself as the boatmen frequently show. He is not given to analysis, and he sees no contradiction between this worship and the rest of his religious creed; indeed, the bronze statues fill a place that would otherwise be left vacant in his pantheon. He looks upon them as leading strong



joyous lives of their own, and caring on the whole very little for human affairs, though he thinks they must be somewhat pleased by sincere devotion. At best they are only good-natured, not good ; and so they stand far below the saints, whose whole time is spent in acts of graciousness and pity. But then you cannot call upon the saints to help you in committing what the Church calls a sin, though doubtless they will often save you from its consequences. With respect to the two bronze figures, he has no such scruples, for he is convinced that their moral code is no more stringent than his own. So he called upon them when the children at Santa Lucia seemed inclined to abandon him to the police, and we know how well he got out of that scrape. Nevertheless, he keeps his irreligious faith a profound secret, partly from a fear of ridicule, no doubt, but partly also because he has a shrewd suspicion that the objects of it are more likely to pay attention to his prayers if the number of their worshippers remains strictly limited.

Peppiniello now sets to work in good earnest, and by twelve o'clock he has collected an ample stock-in-trade, paid the waiter the two soldi he owed him, and received his bread and money from Donna Amalia. He now turns homewards. It is a long way, but he only pauses to buy two slices of water-melon at a stall, and these he carries in his hand until he reaches a small open court at the mouth of a cavern, where a number of women are seated to enjoy as much of the freshness of the night as the high walls of the neighbouring houses will allow. He gives a sharp whistle, and immediately a girl hastens towards him. You can see at a glance that she is Peppiniello's sister. Her name is Concetta, and she is about thirteen years old, though a Northerner would probably think her a year and a half older. Her complexion is sallow than her brother's, her eyes are very bright, and her



24 STORIES OF NAPLES AND THE CAMORRA

black hair, which is tied in a rough wisp round her head, has been burnt and bleached by exposure till the surface coil is almost brown. With a little care it might be made to look well, but it has never been brushed since her mother's death, and is rarely combed more than once a week. Her dress is decent, but it has been patched in many places with different materials, and she is far dirtier than Peppiniello, to whom custom allows the luxury of sea-bathing. Still there is a great deal of intelligence, some kindness, and not a little care in her look. Yet at times she can break into wild fits of merriment, and dance the tarantella with all the wild passion of a bacchanal. She seldom does that, however, when her brother or, indeed, any male person is present, and to-night she follows him very quietly down a narrow street to a little open place, and there seats herself on a doorstep beside him. She feels quite as strongly as he does that it would be beneath his dignity to take a place among the women and girls at the cavern's mouth.

"The children are asleep?" asks Peppiniello, as he gives his sister a hunch of bread and one of the slices of water-melon.

"Yes; and Donna Lucia has promised to have an eye on them till I come back."

Peppiniello now gives the girl four soldi for the household expenses of the morrow, and when he adds eight centesimi to enable them each to buy a piece of water-melon, she knows he has had a prosperous day, for in hard times she and her sisters are obliged to live on a soldo each, and what they can manage to earn or pick up. The bread is a new and pleasant surprise, over which her eyes brighten; to-morrow, housekeeping will be an easy task.

Business being over, the two fall to their suppers with a hearty appetite, while Peppiniello relates all his day's adventures, with the exception of the



bargain with the waiter, and his sacrifice to the statues. The manner of both is quite changed ; they are mere children chatting together as merrily as if they had never known want or care. When he has finished his tale, he places the money in her hand—all except a single soldo which he has hid away before. She counts it over carefully, and then exclaims joyously, "Why, you *have* been lucky ! With the rest this makes seven lire and a half : only ten soldi more and the month's rent is ready, and to-morrow is only the thirteenth."

Peppiniello's tone assumes some of its old business weightiness, as he replies, "Yes, but that must be made up before we spend anything."

Concetta readily assents to this, and then goes on to propose that, even when their rent is ready, they shall continue to hoard their gains until they have money enough to buy one of the children a nice dress, so that they may be able to send her out of an evening to sell flowers to the ladies and gentlemen in the villa. "That is the way to make money." But Peppiniello very decisively rejects the proposal, and the girl, who, like most affectionate women that have not been spoiled by culture, has a habit of obeying even the unreasonable wishes of those whom she loves, gives way at once, and all who know more of Neapolitan life than she does will feel that in this difference her brother is in the right. Still, though she does not sulk or quarrel, she is disappointed by the rejection of her plan, and more silent than usual. She has a great trust, love, and admiration for her brother : they never quarrel, partly perhaps because they are so little together, and, what is more, she never yet had a secret from him. He, as we have seen, is not so open. He never told his sister anything about that purse ; but he had several good reasons for this. He does not wish her to know that he steals, for she might imitate his example, and that



26 STORIES OF NAPLES AND THE CAMORRA

would be unfeminine. There is no harm in boys doing a great many things that girls must not do, and he would be as much shocked to hear that Concetta had been guilty of a theft as to find her swimming in the waters of the harbour. But he had also another reason for keeping that secret. He knew exactly what he wanted to do with the money. The great terror of his life is that some month he may be unable to pay the rent, and that they will consequently be turned into the street. For himself the discomfort would not be great, as in most weathers he can sleep at least as comfortably on a doorstep as in bed ; but he dreads it for the children's, and still more for Concetta's sake. So as soon as the money fell into his hands, he resolved to keep eight lire constantly in store as a resource against cases of the utmost need, and to say nothing about this, in order that neither he nor his sister might be tempted to be less careful in always getting the rent together as early in the month as possible. Nearly three lire were spent on the banquet he had to give to his half-hearted associates. He has still three left to dispose of, but they will go, as six have already gone, to the *lotto*. For that, too, he reserves the soldo, which he daily abstracts from his earnings. It is the only way he knows of investing his savings, but he is afraid of awakening hopes in his sister's mind which a sad experience has shown to be so often fallacious. Yet he has many compunctions of conscience about that soldo, which he tries to quiet by remembering that he allows each of the others the same sum for her daily expenditure. Otherwise he scrupulously shares everything he gains with the rest. If he buys a little fruit, the only way in which he ever spends anything upon himself, he brings them some, or gives them money to do the same. What Concetta and the children can earn or pick up they do as they like with, but though she keeps the family purse,



into which all his gains flow, she never thinks of taking a centesimo out of it without his previous consent.

But, by this time, Peppiniello and his sister have finished their supper and are returning to the cavern's mouth. More than twenty families sleep in that gloomy hole, divided from each other by no partition greater than a line drawn upon the floor. The sides of the grotto are damp, and the air close and fetid with a thousand evil odours, though the entrance and the roof are lofty. You can catch no glimpse of the latter at this time of night ; there is only one great starless darkness overhead, but below, here and there, a tiny oil flame glimmers before the picture of some saint. There is one burning at the foot of Peppiniello's bed, which occupies the worst place but one, that farthest from the entrance, and when the two reach it, after exchanging a few friendly words with Donna Lucia, one of the occupants of the neighbouring bed, they refill the lamp from a little flask, and then kneel down before a rough print of the Virgin to repeat a Paternoster and an Ave.

The bed itself is large enough not only for the whole family, but also to accommodate a stranger now and then, when, of a stormy night, Peppiniello happens to find some homeless boy shivering on a doorstep that does not shelter him from the rain. Three children are now sleeping quietly enough in it. The eldest of them, who may be nine, has a strong family likeness to Concetta, and so has one of the younger girls, whom you take to be six ; but the third, who seems to be of nearly the same age, has quite a different face and figure. She is far more slightly built, has a little rosy mouth and tiny hands and feet. Her skin, though it is bronzed by the sun, is far fairer than that of her bedfellows, and she has fine light brown hair which would be silken if it were kept in proper order. Her name is Mariannina,



28 STORIES OF NAPLES AND THE CAMORRA

and she is not in fact one of Peppiniello's sisters. This is her story :—

One night, about a year ago, when the boy was returning home, he saw her sleeping all alone in the portico of a church. If it had been a boy he would have passed on without taking any notice, but that wasn't a proper place for little girls to sleep in, so he wakened her, and asked where her home was, that he might take her there. It was a long way off, she said ; she didn't know where, but a long, long way. At length, in answer to many questions and a good deal of coaxing, she told him she lived alone with her mother, who, as soon as she had had her breakfast, used to give her a hunch of bread, turn her into the street, lock the door, and go to her work, from which she did not return till after dark. But one morning some time ago—Mariannina did not know exactly how long : it seemed a long while—her mother was lazy and would not get up. The child had nothing to eat that day, but in the evening her mother gave her the key of the cupboard where the bread was, and told her where to find some money. Mariannina had a good time of it for several days, as her mother took no notice of her, and would not eat anything ; but when the money was all spent she told her she had no more, and that she must get her breakfast how she could. She went out to play as usual, and a neighbour gave her something to eat. When she came back her mother was talking very loud, but there was no one else in the room, and the child could not understand what she said. She went on in that way for a long time, but at last she made a strange noise and then she was quite still. Afterwards the lamp before the Virgin went out ; there had been no oil to replenish it with. Next morning, when Mariannina awoke, her mother was still asleep. When she touched her she was quite cold. At first she had tried to awaken her, but she would not speak nor move, so



the child was frightened and ran away. All day she had tried to get as far away as she could. She did not want to go home ; she would go with Peppiniello, and she was hungry.

The kindest as well as the wisest thing would of course have been to take the little orphan to the Foundling Hospital, but Peppiniello never thought of that. He was convinced that the Holy Virgin had sent him to take care of this child, and he was not the boy to shrink from such a trust. Concetta was of the same opinion, and from that day to this Mariannina had been a member of the family. She is a quiet child, with soft, caressing ways, and never has those fits of wild merriment into which the others fall ; but she has also less cheerfulness to face hard times with, and when the supply of food is very scanty, she is apt to be rather subdued and to look weary. The girls treat her exactly as they do each other, but there is just a shade of extra gentleness in the relation between her and her protector, which may arise from the consciousness that the ties between them have been formed by their own free choice, or perhaps from the belief which both entertain that it was the Blessed Virgin who brought them together.

As soon as Peppiniello and Concetta have finished their prayers they arm themselves with two long sticks. A rusty fork is firmly bound to the end of that which the girl leans against her side of the bed, while her brother's terminates in the blade of an old knife, carefully sharpened. As he creeps into his place, Mariannina puts her hands up to his cheeks and falls asleep again in the midst of the caress. And now the purpose of the strange weapons soon becomes clear, for scarcely has quiet been restored when the floor is literally covered with hundreds of rats. Concetta makes several ineffectual thrusts before Peppiniello moves his arm, but at his first blow he succeeds in wounding one of them, which utters a



30 STORIES OF NAPLES AND THE CAMORRA

sharp squeak as it disappears. In a moment all the rest have vanished, and a shrill yet tremulous voice is raised in angry protest from the darkness beyond. At first it utters nothing but vile abuse and frightful curses, but then in a whine it urges that it is a sin to maim and injure the poor creatures. "They, too, are God's children."

"Why doesn't he keep them at home, then? While I'm here, they're not going to nibble Mariannina's toes," replies Peppiniello, but in a tone only just loud enough to catch Concetta's ear, for he respects the age and pities the suffering of the wretched being who has just spoken.

It is Donna Lucia's mother, who, having been found too loathsome to retain her place in the family bed, has been accommodated with a sack of dried maize leaves in the darkest corner of the cave. As her daughter and son-in-law are abroad at their work all day, their children are too little to be of any use, and she cannot move from her pallet, she has perhaps some reason to be grateful to the natural scavengers she vainly endeavours to protect. Perhaps, too, the last affectionate instincts of a motherly nature have centred themselves on the only living beings that constantly surround her. At length the querulous voice dies away, the stick falls from Peppiniello's hand, and he sinks into a sound sleep.¹

¹ The incident of the old woman's affection for the rats is borrowed from Renato Fucini's interesting *Napoli a occhio nudo*, p. 67. On his visiting one of the habitations of the poor, some such wretched being as Donna Lucia's mother used the expression employed in the text, in reproving him for frightening the rats away. The Italian words are *Son creature di Dio anche loro*, and the verbal translation would of course be, "They, too, are God's creatures;" but this would quite fail to give the point of the reproof, for the word *creatura* is constantly applied in affectionate excuse for little children, or to urge their claim on the pity of adults. When a poor widow says in begging, *Tengo tre creature*, she means to insist on their inability to care



V

WHEN Peppiniello wakes he feels instinctively that it is dawn, though as yet no ray of light has penetrated even to the entrance of the cavern ; so he awakens Concetta. She is tired, and would willingly sleep another hour or two as she usually does, but in that case she could not go to mass with her brother, so she rouses herself, and they are soon on their way to a neighbouring church.

It is still dusk, the larger stars have not yet faded out of the sky, and the freshness of the morning air is felt even in the narrow streets through which their way leads them. There is a stillness everywhere, and an unusual light on common things, which impress both the children, but chiefly Concetta, who never rises so early except when she goes to mass. And when they pass the portal of the church the blaze of the candles upon the altar, the glow of the polished marble, the rich colours of the hangings, seem to stand in a strange contrast, not only to the quiet twilight outside, but also to all their ordinary surroundings. To you and me the church looks gaudy, a miracle of bad taste, it may be ; to them it is a little glimpse of splendour which they feel all the more keenly because it is so different from all the sordid circumstances of their daily life. And they are so safe here, too. Dirty

for themselves in any way, and *Sono creature* is the constant plea of the mother whose children have excited the anger of a grown up person ; pretty much as an Englishwoman might say, "They are too young to know what they are doing, poor things." In calling the rats *creature di Dio*, therefore, the old woman wished to insist upon their weakness and their ignorance of right and wrong as a claim upon human pity, quite as much as on the fact of their having been created by God ; almost as if she had said, "Spare the poor helpless innocents who have no protector but Him who made them."



32 STORIES OF NAPLES AND THE CAMORRA

as they are, no one rudely forbids their entrance or will push them from the altar step at which they kneel. For this is no great man's palace, but the house of God and the Madonna, and even these outcast children have a right to a place in it.

And so the mass begins, and Peppiniello remembers a number of trifles, and asks forgiveness for them. He thinks about the daily soldo he conceals from his sister, and has half a mind not to do so any more, though he is by no means sure it is a sin, and he thanks God and the Madonna for having taken care of him so often, but particularly yesterday, and prays them still to be good to him and his sisters and Mariannina, and to the girl who so kindly befriended him yesterday. For the rest of his friends and benefactors he prays in a general way and in the usual form; he does not specially think even of Donna Amalia or Don Antonio (though he would pray for both if they asked him), far less of the English sailors; and when he repeats the petition which he has been taught to use with respect to his enemies, I doubt whether any remembrance of Donna Estere comes into his head. When the elevation of the Host is past, and the time has come to remember the dead, Concetta gently presses his hand, and he prays for the souls of his parents and of Mariannina's mother, and for "all that rest in Christ." She remembers their old home better, and thinks oftener about it, than he does, and so she is more moved by this part of the service, which he is sometimes apt to forget.

And all his real sins, his lies and thefts, doesn't he repent of them? I am afraid not. Some time ago he took his sisters to see the miracle of San Gennaro, and, when the liquefaction of the blood was long delayed, did not think of all the other spectators who crowded the church, but concluded that it was some personal sin of his that had offended the saint. So he searched his conscience, and remembered that some time before



he had refused an old woman a part of his scanty dinner, even though she had begged for it in the Madonna's name, and that he had spoken harshly to Donna Lucia's mother a few days afterwards ; and he resolved to be gentler and kinder to the aged and infirm in future. Then the miracle was wrought, and hitherto he has kept his resolution. But his lies and thefts he did not remember. Nay, when he next prepares himself for confession, they will probably be the last sins that come into his mind. When the priest insists on their wickedness, the boy will be moved, and he will really repent, and make up his mind to give them up altogether, and for a day or two he will persevere ; but then he will begin to consider the matter from a worldly point of view. The priest was doubtless right in what he said. Peppiniello himself can hardly imagine that a saint ever picked anyone's pocket, but then there is no chance of his ever becoming a saint, and *they* know how hard a poor *mozzonare's* life is, and will not judge him too harshly. In some such way he will probably arrive at the conclusion that perfect honesty is a luxury as far beyond his means as the whelks and periwinkles which are heaped upon the itinerant vendor's tray, and whose dainty odours so often vainly excite his appetite.

But now the mass is over, and Peppiniello and Concetta pass out of the church into the golden morning sunshine and there part, each to begin anew the labours and adventures of the day. And here we must leave them for the present.



GABRIELE

I

INTRODUCTION

IN the old days before the Duke of San Donato had even been elected Mayor of Naples, when tramways were still unknown to the city, and the Villa had no grand new *rimbombo* to boast of, a strip of sandy shore used to run outside the avenues of that promenade, and extend beyond it as far as Mergellina. The place is now occupied by the great embankment, which forms one of the finest carriage-drives in Europe, on account of the mountains and the sea which it commands. It is pleasant to drive along it of a summer evening, when the sun is setting and the air is still fresh with the sea-breeze ; yet I seldom do so without regretting the loss of one of my favourite haunts. For the little strip of coast broadened in the neighbourhood of Mergellina, and it served the fisher people of the district as a gathering place and playground. The men mended their nets and rigging, and the women dried their clothes there, while on summer days a swarm of children was always to be found playing in the shadow of the boats, which were drawn high up on the shore. The older boys rarely thought it necessary to wear anything more than a shirt, which could easily be cast aside as soon as it seemed desirable to vary the amusement of rolling in



the sand by a dip and swim in the sea, and their younger brothers were untrammelled by even that reminiscence of the Fall. The little girls were all dressed, of course, and they sat in groups apart, for the children of both sexes rarely either play or dance together in Naples. Altogether it was a bright and varied scene which could not but strike a stranger who had been used only to the subdued manners and indoor life of northern towns.

It was here I first made the acquaintance of three fishermen, with two of whom I afterwards became almost intimate. They were seated in the shadow of a boat, each engaged in some light manual occupation connected with his craft, and they frequently interrupted their chat to address a merry or soothing word to a girl of three, who was playing at their feet with a boy of about the same age. They were so bronzed by exposure to the weather, that it would have been difficult to make any nearer guess as to their age than to say they were all probably between thirty and fifty. The dress of two of them was the usual summer attire of their class. They wore a woollen shirt and short linen trousers, which reached but little below the knee. The rest of their legs and their feet were bare, and they had the peculiar head-dress on, which resembles a gigantic night-cap, and is the badge of their class. A red scarf worn as a belt round the waist completed the costume. Salvatore was rather better dressed than either of his companions, and in a somewhat nearer approach to sailor fashion. The trousers were longer, and he had a blouse over his shirt; but you felt at once that this finery was not put on out of vanity, and that he did not belong to a higher class than his friends.

It was near sunset; he was sitting with his hands idly resting on some piece of unfinished sailor work, and his eyes dreamily fixed on the sea. He was rather below the middle height, and his body, though



36 STORIES OF NAPLES AND THE CAMORRA

well made, inclined to stoutness, and did not promise any great strength or agility. There was a want of energy, too, about the lines of the mouth, and perhaps almost as much indolence as affectionateness in the soft, deep blue eyes. The prevailing expression of the face, however, was one of perfect frankness and good-will. I have often wondered that I did not at first notice what I soon came to regard as the most remarkable thing about it—a certain look of quiet, patient resignation, as if he had found the world by no means an easy place to live in, had made up his mind to bear the troubles it might bring him silently, and had learned to regard them without any great surprise. But a single glance was sufficient to convince one that whatever strength of character the man might possess must be shown in gentleness and cheerful endurance, not in resolute action.

In this respect he formed a strong contrast to Michele, who was seated beside him, a tall, powerfully built man, with slightly stooping shoulders, who might have stood as a model for St. Christopher. Every muscle and sinew spoke of force, every line and furrow on the face, of passion and of will. There was a fire in the black eyes which you felt would flash out if occasion required, though it was softened to a strange gentleness whenever he spoke to his daughter. The jaws were massive, the mouth large, and the lips full and a little uncertain in their movements. The thick, coarse, jet-black hair looked shaggy, though it was kept closely cut. There was something wild, or perhaps I should rather say untamed, about the whole face and figure, but there was an easy beneficence about them as well, and the first impression they made on me was,—That is a man in whom you might repose entire trust if once you had gained a hold on his affections.

The third fisherman, Gabriele, was about five feet three inches in height, and had an exceedingly com-



pact and well-knit frame. The eyes were hazel, the mouth was tightly compressed, though the lips were full, and the whole face was remarkably intelligent ; nay, more, it wore the expression of one who is accustomed to command both himself and others, of a power not spent in sudden outbursts of passion, but carefully directed to given ends. His dress was more careless than that of either of his companions ; the open shirt exposed the broad, brown, hairy chest, and he had made no effort to conceal the medals that hung round his neck. The others doubtless had amulets of a similar character beneath their clothing ; for few Neapolitan fishermen are bold enough to venture far to sea without the protection they afford, though a fear of ridicule generally induces them to hide them from the eyes of strangers.

"Can I have a boat ?" I asked.

"Where for ?" inquired Michele.

"Only the Frisio."

Michele silently resumed his work ; he was weaving one of the basket traps in which cuttle-fish are caught ; but Salvatore rose rather lazily, asked Gabriele to take care of his little boy, and led me to his boat.

That was the first of many pleasant sails that I had with him. On summer evenings when the Bay was quiet you could hardly find a more agreeable companion, for there was something strangely childlike about the man. The simplest things were a source of wonder and amusement to him, but his great delight, as I soon discovered, was in fireworks. Whenever a Church celebrated the virtues of its patron saint by a great display of rockets and Bengal fire, Salvatore was sure to be there, unless he was detained by the most important business. We sometimes viewed such a spectacle from the sea, and then he would clasp his hands and gaze in ecstasy, only murmuring beneath his breath, but in a tone of the deepest rapture, "How beautiful it is ! how beautiful !"



38 STORIES OF NAPLES AND THE CAMORRA

He would rather have been on shore, though, in the midst of the joyous crowd, for the noise charmed him quite as much as the light, and the sound of an exploding Jack-in-the-box was the sweetest of music to his ears. On such occasions, particularly when small fireworks were let loose among the people, he would hop and spring about in a terror half real and half make-believe, even to himself, and in an ecstasy of pleasure such as northern school-boys rarely show.

Touched by the simplicity of this taste, a foreign gentleman once made him a present of a packet of squibs and crackers on the afternoon of the 31st of December. Salvatore had never possessed such a treasure before. A part of the happiness he had so often shared with others had now become his private property, and was entirely at his own disposal. He could not wait till evening came. As soon as politeness allowed, he made his escape and hastened to the sea-shore, and there, in the full sunshine, proceeded to let off the fireworks. But it was a dreadful pleasure, a fearful joy. I can still see him, with a light affixed to a long stick, setting fire to them one by one, and then running away, as soon as each had fairly caught.

I have called Salvatore a fisherman, and it was thus he always designated himself; but it was only when times were hard that he took to real fishing, and then, I fancy, he was not very successful; indeed, it must have been a simple fish that he could beguile. For the greater part of the year he earned his living as a boatman, and he had therefore been brought a good deal into contact with strangers, and knew that in many respects their opinions differed from those of his own class. This had not rendered him in the least sceptical as to the truth of the old stories, and the value of the old charms, but it made him chary of talking about them. We had been acquainted for



weeks before he even told me of the terrible crocodile, or rather dragon, kept by the wicked Queen Giovanna in a dungeon underneath her palace communicating with the sea through grated doors, to which she caused her lovers to be thrown when she was tired of them. On stormy nights you can still hear the shrieks and howls of the horrid creature, which has been dead for hundreds of years. For some animals have immortal souls. Monkeys and porpoises, for instance, were the living prisons assigned to some of the fallen angels, in which they expiate a guilt less than that of Satan. Whether there is any hope of their being finally restored to bliss Salvatore did not know, but of the truth of the fact there could be no doubt, for not so many years ago a porpoise got entangled in the nets of some of the fishermen of Mergellina, and when one of them, in a fit of rage, exclaimed: "The devil take me and the nets!" it raised its black head from the waves, and said quite distinctly, in a human voice: "That is what I have come to do." Though the men left their nets and hastened home at once, their unfortunate comrade had scarcely time to confess his sins and receive the Sacraments before he died.

When Salvatore found that I lent a willing, and seemingly credulous, ear to his stories, he grew quite eager to tell them. He showed me two small rocks in one of the little inlets, which regularly change places with each other on New Year's Eve; the lilies which grow only on those parts of the shore where the bark that bore the dead body of Santa Restituta touched and rested for a space, the sinful city that was engulfed by the waters of the Bay of Baiæ, and many other interesting things. He spoke of the Madonna too, and had many legends to relate about her. It was from him I first heard some broken fragments of the story of Our Lady of Light. In the old times, it seems, a merchant who was returning from



40 STORIES OF NAPLES AND THE CAMORRA

distant lands reached Naples in the midst of a dark and stormy night. There was no lighthouse then, and the port was hard to make. No pilot was to be found, the waves were running high, and the sailors did not know where they were ; so they gave themselves up for lost. But the master of the ship was a pious man, who had always possessed a special devotion for Our Lady, and now, in his great need, it suddenly came into his mind to call upon her by a new name, and he prayed to St. Mary, Queen of the Light, to help him. Scarcely had he uttered the words, when a bright light appeared on the prow of the ship, and wherever its rays fell on the black, troubled waters they grew calm, and the vessel glided safely into harbour. Then, just before she vanished, the pious merchant gazed for one moment upon the very face of the Mother of God. Next morning he sold his ship and all it contained, and built a chapel in her honour. It still stands on the Chiaia : nay, even now mass is read there, and in their need benighted seamen still call upon St. Mary of the Light and she helps them.

Salvatore was not by any means a good story-teller in the common sense of the words, but both his eyes and his voice would soften when he told how two orphan children were left alone in the world, and how they wandered aimlessly and helplessly into a church, and came to an image of Santa Anna, and because her look was so kind and motherly asked her to take care of them ; and how she came to them that evening, and gave them bread to eat, and wrapped them in her own cloak. Every morning the children went to the church to see and thank her, and every evening she came to feed and comfort them ; till one night, when winter was drawing near, she took them by the hand and brought them to a good abbess, who cared for them ever afterwards.

All these things Salvatore implicitly believed, yet if



any foreign gentleman had made a jest of them, he would have joined in the laugh, and said they were the stories foolish old women told each other. But he had other narratives which I fancy he himself regarded as fiction. These were fairy tales, in which, however, saints generally played the part of the good fairies. San Giuseppe, in particular, displayed an extraordinary skill and address in providing his favourites with lovely princesses and magnificent kingdoms. But, to gain his favour, it was above all things necessary that the hero should be of a pitying disposition, and provide work for children and the aged, as well as for the robust and vigorous. Salvatore's mind was so imbued with the moral of these stories that I feel sure, if I had asked him to find a second boatman in order that we might make a longer excursion together, he would carefully have sought the most decrepit old man in the district.

But then, no one would ever have thought of giving him such a commission. Even those who liked him best felt that it would be unwise to rely upon him when great exertion might be needed, or any danger was to be apprehended. In such cases I always applied to Michele, with whom also I soon established friendly relations. No one knew the whole adjacent coast better, or could foretell with greater certainty the changes of wind and weather. He was a thorough seaman, and in his youth had made several voyages to the coast of Africa, but on his marriage he had resolved to stay at home and adopt his father's trade—that of a fisherman. His manners were far less deferential than those of Salvatore, and he rarely made an offer of his services as a boatman. Indeed, it was only occasionally, and for the more distant excursions, that he would consent to form one of a party, and then it was an understood thing that he was to be master of the boat. On such trips he would usually lie outstretched at full length,



42 STORIES OF NAPLES AND THE CAMORRA

and merely give his orders to the rest. The common and simple work fell to their share, but as soon as there was anything really to be done he was all life and action. In rowing against the wind I doubt if he had his equal in the whole Bay. Yet there was no brag or bluster about him, and those who have seen him under such circumstances have told me that in times of real danger, the louder the wind blew, the quieter he became. He was fond of wine, and would drink large quantities of it, now and then ; but its only effect upon him was to loosen his tongue a little, and make him a pleasanter companion than before. At such times he too would tell stories, but they were always of a humorous turn, and illustrative of the great stupidity of the inhabitants of certain towns and villages on the coast. They never, by any chance, had a sentimental or religious colouring ; indeed, when he mentioned such subjects it was always in a tone of contempt. Not that he was by any means a free-thinker ; he simply looked at an interest in these things as unmanly. He went to mass regularly on Sundays and festivals, and confessed pretty frequently too, except when he happened to have a quarrel with his priest, which was by no means a rare occurrence, for Michele was impatient of all control. If his Father Confessor imposed a penance of what appeared to him undue severity, he would simply refuse to do it, and leave the church. He then felt himself an ill-used man, and for a week or two would live at enmity with God and the world. He could be brought to attend no religious service, and if the Host chanced to be carried past, he would not bare his head, but look another way, and pretend not to see it. Then perhaps he would get into trouble, and reflect upon his evil ways, and make submission, or a piece of unexpected good luck would come, sent doubtless by some pitying saint, and that would thaw his heart. These conflicts were far more fre-



quent in Michele's youth than later on in life, and they lasted longer, for in his thirty-fourth year an event occurred which inspired him with a certain dread of his own nature. A child of his, a girl, of whom he had been particularly fond, died suddenly. Michele had been absent at the time on some distant fishing excursion, and when he returned, only to see the little face looking so pinched and pale among the red flowers the women had laid around it, he stood by the bed, and in his rage and grief he cursed God and the Madonna from the bottom of his heart. Then a revulsion of feeling came, dread and remorse for what he had done, and he went out from among the horror-struck mourners, and wept bitterly. He did not return to his home that night, but spent it sobbing before an altar of the Blessed Virgin. The priest in pity allowed him to remain there, heard his confession, and granted him absolution; but he never afterwards was quite the same man he had been before. He still rebelled at times; but as soon as the first fit of anger was over he could no longer persuade himself that it was right to rebel, and so his fits of obstinacy became shorter and rarer. But that was no reason why he should not make or laugh at a good joke, which the Madonna would doubtless hear as good-humouredly as his own wife did the far coarser jests he put upon her.

In the broad daylight, or even on a stormy night when he was at sea, Michele was a brave man; few are braver, or have given more convincing proofs of courage. Those who lost their coolness in danger were to him an object of the most unpitying scorn. "That's a man who will fall a praying, instead of standing by his oar," was his favourite phrase for denoting a bad seaman. Yet a time came when he too felt the meaning of fear. He had been condemned to three days' imprisonment for some small offence, I forget what it was. He may have neglected to take out a

license for his boat in due time, or have tried to smuggle in a barrel of wine, or something of that sort, which neither he nor his companions would be at all inclined to judge harshly. Indeed he looked upon the affair as rather a happy joke, until night came on, and he found he was to sleep alone, in a room without a light. That was what he had never done all his life long, for a little lamp had been kept perpetually burning before the picture of the Virgin both in his mother's house and in his own. It was new and inexpressibly terrible to him. At first his dread was quite without form, but soon it assumed a thousand fantastic shapes. Every horrible sight that he had seen or heard of seemed to be present there in the darkness, close beside his bed—only the more terribly present because it was invisible. But two tormented him more than all the rest, the corpse of his elder brother who had been drowned when he was only four years old, and that of his mother, as he had seen it some years later, hideously distorted by her agony in the awful time of the cholera. He strove to recall pleasanter thoughts of his mother—his brother he could hardly remember except as a dead body—but his efforts only gave a new direction to his fears. It suddenly flashed upon his memory that she had told him that the light before the Madonna was kept burning to drive evil spirits, especially the *monacelli*, away. He had no light now. He hardly dared to think what ghastly guests might visit him. He strove to drive out of his mind the frightful stories he had heard. It was all in vain ; the cold drops of sweat stood up on the strong man's brow. At last, by a resolute effort, he sprang from his bed, and paced up and down the little cell until the morning's light shone clearly in upon him.

When Salvatore came next day to visit his friend, he was amazed to see how pale and haggard he looked, and readily undertook to smuggle in a light



before evening. This he succeeded in doing, but as he left the prison gate he could not help wondering how it was that the brave, strong Michele should be unmanned by the darkness. Did he doubt that God and the Madonna were there as well as in the sunlight, or that the *monacelli* must quail before them? He could not understand it; but he refrained from questioning Michele on the subject, or saying a word which might have led others to doubt the courage of one of his two great protectors.

Salvatore's other protector was Gabriele, whose acquaintance I also made, though I never became so intimate with him as with the other two. He had a strong dislike to gentlemen of all kinds, particularly to foreigners, and he would as soon have thought of becoming one of their liveried servants—lamp-rags, he used to call them—as of acting as boatman to any of them. Once, indeed, I was at sea with him. I had been anxious to see some good fish-spearing, and with some difficulty Michele persuaded him to accompany us. But it was in Michele's boat that we went, and I could not induce Gabriele to accept any gratuity, except a few cigars and a litre of wine. On all other occasions he positively refused to go with us from the first, or found some excuse for absenting himself when the time came. Our acquaintance was therefore confined to a few casual chats on the shore, though towards the end of my first stay in Naples I think he had begun to regard me with a certain friendliness, which, however, was by no means unmixed with suspicion. I regretted this at the time, as he evidently exercised a very great influence over his associates, was their authority on all questions of right and custom, and the arbiter of many of their disputes. Besides this, his fame as a fisherman stood very high. A few might excel him in single branches, such as diving for *latteri*, but at that time there was no one, at least in Mergellina, who could rival him in

his command over all the resources of his art. His knowledge of the exact spots at which the kinds of fish he wanted were to be found at any given hour, in particular, was said to verge upon divination, and he was quite as good a sailor as a fisherman, though, unlike most of his companions, he preferred, whenever it was possible, to carry on his business quite alone, and was consequently obliged, as a rule, to abstain from distant excursions. In a word, all that I heard about him interested me, but my regret that our personal intercourse had been so small was greatly increased when I became acquainted with certain particulars as to his life which form the subject of the present sketch. I owe most of them to Salvatore, who, when he was in a communicative mood, and had a sympathetic listener, would sometimes forget that silence is wiser than words. Not that he told me the story as I shall endeavour to tell it to you. But in the long spring days, as we floated lazily in his boat, or lay outstretched on the shore together, he would relate now one incident, now another, in illustration of some part of his discourse. On such occasions, if I questioned him further on the matter, he remembered he had been imprudent, and grew silent, or endeavoured to change the subject. I was therefore obliged to repress any direct expression of my curiosity, and to be satisfied with turning the conversation in a direction which was likely to lead to some disclosure. In this I was not always successful, but by degrees I managed to draw from him an account of the more important events. I have since endeavoured to extend and connect the narrative, the salient points of which were thus supplied, by such information as I have been able to gather from other quarters, and sometimes, it must be confessed, by conjectures that are perhaps little better than guess-work.



II

MOTHER AND SON

GABRIELE'S parents were not Neapolitans by birth. They had come to Mergellina shortly after their marriage, from a small village on the Calabrian coast, and it was said they had been obliged to do so, because the husband had been involved in a vendetta which rendered his further stay at home impossible. It was a feud of old standing between the family of his wife and that of a peasant who lived in a little fortified town on the top of a hill, about six miles off ; but people thought that it might have been brought to an end if the fisherman had consented to give Lucia to the eldest son of his enemy, and that the girl herself would not have objected to the match. Be that as it may, it is certain that the hostility, which had for a time abated, broke out with renewed force shortly after the marriage, and rendered it advisable for the young couple to choose another place of residence.

The husband was not particularly successful there. He had done well enough in his own village, but he was one of those men who need the force of public opinion to keep them steadily at work, and he had but very little respect for his new companions, though by degrees he formed a strong friendship with one or two of them. He loved to sing the songs of his own land over strange wine, and to show how much more a Calabrian could drink than a Neapolitan without losing his self-command. He was more prone to take offence, too, and he remembered a real or a fancied injury longer than his new associates ; and, as he was one of the poorest among them, he was generally the chief loser by such quarrels. On the other hand, he was noted for a dogged fidelity to his friends, which shrank from no danger and hesitated



48 STORIES OF NAPLES AND THE CAMORRA

at no sacrifice, and this endeared him to some of them, particularly to Agniello, Michele's father.

Lucia, for her part, was far from being happy in her new home. She too felt a strong contempt for the Neapolitans, which she was at no pains to conceal, and which the women of her neighbourhood heartily repaid. Besides this, her habitual reserve excited their dislike, and the sharp words she would occasionally use, their fear. So they held aloof from her, and, as her quiet life afforded no other materials for gossip, they criticised and mimicked her outlandish ways, and speculated on the curtain lectures she was supposed to deliver nightly. In this, however, they were mistaken, for the Calabrian woman had a due sense of subordination. She was dissatisfied with her husband's incapacity, and with his inclination to spend the greater part of his small earnings on his own amusements, and she strongly objected to his habit of taking his son with him to the *taverna*, in order that he might learn to drink "like a Calabrian," which was almost the only thing he used to teach him. He was not by any means the husband she would have chosen—she never tried to deceive herself on that point—but she had accepted him at her father's bidding, and now it was clearly her duty to obey him. She had a habit, too, of looking a good way in advance before speaking and acting; she knew that in a real quarrel she must certainly be worsted, as it would in the end be decided by physical force, and so she did her best to keep the house in order, and never complained.

When Gabriele was very young—little more than eleven years old, I think—his father died, and left nothing but debts and the simple household furniture, which had been purchased with his wife's dowry. The boy was deeply affected by this event, for he had regarded his father with passionate love and admiration, as the strongest, the boldest, and the most perfect



of men. He felt lonely and helpless now that his protector was gone, though he could not at first fully realise that he should never see him again. And then it was the first time the child had seen death, and that, too, awakened strange thoughts. He passed from passionate weeping into silent reveries, and from these back again to his sobs and tears.

There was no one that he could talk to about it. His playmates, he instinctively felt, could understand as little of these matters as he would have done only a week ago, before he knew there was anything dangerous in his father's illness. Was it only a week? It seemed longer than all his former life. His old comrades were doubtless playing their old games on the seashore, his father's friends, he knew, were following their old avocations, just as if nothing wonderful and terrible had occurred. And his mother? He never thought of her as a possible confidante. From the time when he could fairly walk alone, he had rarely been at home except when his father was there, and then her subdued ways and quiet submissiveness had not been calculated to excite his veneration; he looked upon her as a kind, but entirely unimportant, personage. Indeed I am afraid that at this period of his life he entertained no great respect for women in general, his poor opinion of them being partly formed on his personal observation as to the awkward way in which girls throw stones when they enter on so noble a diversion, and partly on the remarks he had heard made by older men in the *taverna* when he was practising the Calabrian virtue in which his father chiefly excelled.

So, when he went out on the morning after the funeral, Gabriele did not turn his steps towards any of his accustomed haunts. He felt in need of sympathy, and yet he shrank from meeting any of his associates; so he wandered about aimlessly, till he grew hot and weary; then he listlessly retraced his



50 STORIES OF NAPLES AND THE CAMORRA

steps, and had almost reached his home, when it suddenly occurred to him that he might go into a church and rest. He would not go to Santa Anna's, for most likely some of the fisherwomen whom he knew would be there, but San Guiseppe's was close by, and they never went there except on great occasions, whereas he had always loved the place.

Down to the time when the priest had been admitted to his father's chamber to hear his confession and administer the last rites of the Church, religion had only been associated with merriment in the boy's mind. The festivals and saints' days had been his holidays, and the fireworks and processions with which they were celebrated his chief shows and diversions. Lent hardly straitened the simple fare to which he was accustomed, whereas Easter covered even the table of the poorest with good things. He had learned some prayers, and knew the general purport of the Mass, of course ; but, though he repeated the first, and attended the second, regularly enough, he rarely thought anything at all about their meaning. Nor was it by any means the first time that he had sought shelter from the summer heat within consecrated walls; but to-day everything seemed to have a new significance for him. He could not have explained the change, for it was one not of thought, but of feeling. Everything affected him differently, and, while secular matters had lost all their importance for him, the service touched him as it had never done before. In a minute or two he sank upon his knees, his tears flowed silently, and trickled down between the fingers with which he hid his face. He remained kneeling there, hour after hour, and, when noon was past and the time for closing the church had come, the sexton found that he was fast asleep.

Lucia, too, had been deeply impressed by the loss of her husband. During the last two days of his life,



when all hope of his recovery had been abandoned, she had felt something more closely approaching affection for him than she had ever done before ; and while the body remained in the house she had, with a natural piety, resolutely refrained from all worldly thoughts ; but to-day, after hearing Mass and putting the house in order, she sat down to consider quietly her chances of keeping a home for her son until he should be of an age to help her. It was not a pleasant prospect. She had, it is true, no doubt of her ability to earn a simple livelihood for them both, and even to pay off the debts little by little, if only she could gain time ; for, if she had hitherto made no effort to increase the scanty income of the family by her own labour, it was neither from pride, nor want of skill, as the neighbours supposed, but because she knew that her earnings would be of little advantage to herself and Gabriele ; they would only encourage her husband to idle a little longer, and go to the *taverna* more frequently than before. That was a purpose for which she did not choose to work ; but, now she had an object in view, she was ready to do her best. She could wash, spin string, and mend nets, as well as any woman she knew—better than most of them, she thought ; and very few understood how to make a small sum go as far as she did. Yes, all would come right if she could only gain time. But the more carefully she added up the sums she owed, the more discouraged she became. It was not likely people would wait so long, she supposed. The things would have to go, and then she looked fondly at the poor furniture of her room. It was worth but little, and to other eyes might look vulgar and ugly, but then it was her all, and in her lonely life she had formed almost a personal attachment to every single piece of it.

Meanwhile Agniello, too, had been pondering over Lucia's position. His old friend had evidently not been in a very prosperous way, and something must



52 STORIES OF NAPLES AND THE CAMORRA

be done for his widow. "I don't mean exactly in the money way," he said to himself, "though I shouldn't mind a lira or two, perhaps even five, if I saw a need for it. That's giving; I might lend her more if there were good security; but there isn't. Well, well, the chief thing is to put her in the way of earning a livelihood. She'll have a hard time of it, poor thing, for the women folk say she is fit for nothing. One must see and get her what odd jobs one can. She and the boy can run in and have a meal with us every now and then, we sha'n't miss what they eat. I wonder what she thinks about it all; I'll just look in and see."

These reflections had occupied Agniello considerably more than an hour, for his mind was accustomed to move slowly when money matters were concerned, and it was five minutes more before he really rose from the sand, and sauntered off in the direction of Lucia's house. As he went he continued his musings. "She's in debt, most likely. I wish I knew for how much it is. But she won't tell the truth if I ask her, people never do." So he turned aside to call at a little general shop, and, while making a small purchase, he managed to ascertain that she owed almost fifteen lire there.

"Fifteen lire is a large sum, a very large sum," the fisherman thought as he continued his way. "Still the furniture must be worth more than that. Perhaps I may lend it her if it's all she owes; but I must have a good look at the things first, and hear what the neighbours say. I won't bind myself to anything to-day, at all events. I'll only have a chat with her."

Agniello was fond of making such good resolutions as this. They eased his mind at the time, but he rarely kept them, though he never broke his promises. He liked to think himself a close-fisted man, and many of his associates imagined him to be one. But to-day, at least, his purpose was kind. He really



wished to do something for Lucia, and it was only natural that he should prefer doing it in the way which caused the smallest inconvenience to himself. Now, of all forms of charity, lending money—on good security of course, but without interest—was his favourite, for such transactions not only gratified his good nature, but relieved his feelings in another way. He was already a *padrone*, that is to say, he possessed two fishing smacks with the necessary nets and equipment, and he had no wish to extend his business ; so, as he was too old-fashioned to trust any bank, and too honest to dabble in usury, he was obliged to hide his savings in all kinds of holes and corners about the house, and there they were a constant source of anxiety to him. He lived in the belief that his frugal wife was a spendthrift, who could only be restrained from extravagance by being kept strictly to her daily allowance, and the great object of his life was to conceal his riches from her. The good woman knew well enough the exact position and amount of each of his treasure troves, though she feigned ignorance, and when she wanted to tease him a little she would unearth one of them, and ask him if he knew how the money got there. This question always caused him considerable perplexity ; for, if he denied all knowledge of the money, she would of course appropriate it to her own use, while to lay claim to it would be to confess the possession of hidden wealth. When she had amused herself sufficiently in this way, however, she would leave the mysterious treasure in some place where she knew he would find and seize upon it. This he generally did as soon as her back was turned, and the fact that she never afterwards referred to the sums which thus vanished confirmed her husband in the belief that it would be absurd to trust her with money.

Lucia rose to meet her visitor with very mixed feelings. His wealth and position inspired respect,



54 STORIES OF NAPLES AND THE CAMORRA

and he might be of great use in obtaining work for her ; but then he had been one of her husband's boon companions, and that was no recommendation in her eyes. Why had he come? she wondered. Was money owing to him too? No, by all accounts he was far too prudent a man to put trust in her husband's indefinite promises to pay.

After a few such remarks as the occasion naturally suggested, the fisherman asked abruptly :—

"And you, what do you intend to do now? how are you going to live?"

The tone in which the words were spoken was harsher than the feeling which prompted it. The widow resented it.

"How do other women who are left alone in the world live? I shall do as they do, I suppose."

"But it takes a long time to learn to make string, and they say it's almost as bad with the washing."

Lucia fetched a number of shirts and put them on the table.

"I washed those."

"Did you?" asked the *padrone*, fingering the linen dubiously. "They look right enough, but I don't understand woman's work."

"But you understand string ; give me some to spin, and you'll find it will turn out as good as any you've been used to, at all events. Why, I've been accustomed to such work from my childhood."

Agniello's face brightened. "That's a good thing. I'm very glad of it," he said heartily.

The change had its effect upon the widow. "If you can find anything for me to do, I shall be very grateful to you," she replied.

"Of course I will, if you're as clever as you say ; I'll see you're never in want of work. Your husband, poor man, was a friend of mine, and I thought maybe you'd like to talk over your affairs with some one. That's why I came in."



"It was very kind of you," rejoined Lucia, in a tone that showed she really felt the words, but she volunteered no further information.

Agniello was again in difficulties. He wanted to ask about the debts in a way that would not suggest any readiness on his part to advance money to meet them, at least till he had been permitted to scrutinise the furniture more closely. He pulled off his cap, and kept fidgeting about with it for some time before he ventured to remark, "Most likely you'll be owing a little money here and there?"

"Yes," replied Lucia, "illness is costly. I have been obliged to borrow twenty lire of a money-lender."¹

"Dear me, what were his terms?"

"I am to pay a lira and a half a week; the lira goes to pay off the debt, and the half is for the interest."

"How could you borrow at such a rate?"

"It was for the medicine. He was lying moaning there. I felt as if I could have pledged my soul to help him."

"But you had friends, why did you not ask their assistance?"

"I have none, and his friendships were made over the bottle, and such only last till it's empty."

"You should not say that. He was always faithful to his companions."

"Oh, yes, he—but then he was a Calabrian. Besides, I don't fancy anybody thought we were rich, and so, I suppose, if they'd wanted they'd have offered to help him."

"Very likely—perhaps they would," said the fisherman abstractedly; but then he added with energy, "You must pay the money at once."

¹ I have transferred all these reckonings, originally made in *ducati* and *carlini*, with which the English reader is not likely to be familiar, into modern Italian money, which is the same as that of France.



56 STORIES OF NAPLES AND THE CAMORRA

"But how can I? I have only got two lire and six soldi left, and when that is spent—" The widow's eyes were full of tears.

"Oh, you'll get on, you'll earn plenty of money soon—and—I don't mind telling you as a secret, if you'll promise never to breathe a word about it—"

Lucia promised.

"Particularly not to my wife."

She promised again.

"Well, I've got a little money hidden away somewhere. It isn't much, you know, only something put by against my old age, but I dare say there may be twenty lire,—twenty or perhaps twenty-four, by this time. Now I don't mind lending you that to set you free from the old cuttle-fish. You'll pay me as you would him—without the interest, of course."

"Thank you, thank you," cried Lucia, seizing the fisherman's hand. Her eyes had brightened, though the tears were running down her cheeks now. But suddenly a new shadow came over her face, and she added in a different tone—"No, Agniello, I'm very, very much obliged to you, but I can't take the money."

"Why not?"

"There are other debts as well, and I'm not sure, do the best I can, I shall be able to pay you regularly."

"But you'll have to pay the usurer?"

"I shall do all I can, but he must take his chance. Don't you see the difference? When a man tries to grind the last soldo he can out of you, when he uses sorrow, and pain, and death as his means of driving a bargain, you hope and try to fulfil your obligation, but—well, if you fail, and he loses in the end, it does not seem such a great sin, after all. But you have come as a true friend to comfort me in my loneliness, and to help me, and if I were to take your money, and to promise to pay it back, when I am not quite



sure that I shall be able to do so, that would be base—that would be wicked.”

Agniello was touched. “I dare say matters are not quite as bad as you think,” he said, “tell me what you owe?”

The widow enumerated her debts one by one, and stated the exact amount of each; they came altogether to a little more than seventy lire.

“Are you sure that’s all?” asked the fisherman.

“Quite sure.”

“Then I’ll tell you what we’ll do. I’ll just settle these bills, so that the people may not be dunning you, and if you pay me a lira a week, you’ll be quite clear in less than a year and a half; but you mustn’t say a word about it to any one, or give me the money except when we’re alone. No, no, don’t go on so. And this evening you’d better take one of those shirts to my wife, to show her what you can do. There’s a bit of net wants mending, you can bring that back with you, at all events. Keep up a good heart; you’ll see, everything will come right soon.”

Agniello had got half way home before he remembered that he had not examined the furniture after all. He paused and scratched himself behind the ear rather dolefully, but after a while his face brightened, as he thought, “Even if she fails I sha’n’t be quite ruined; but she won’t fail, not she. The security is good enough.”

Lucia not only prepared a very scanty dinner that day, but, for educational purposes, she chose the very viands which she knew her son disliked. She must explain the position they were in to him, and make him feel that he would have to obey her in future, though he had never done so hitherto. He would be sure to quarrel with the meal, and that would give her an opportunity of commencing her lecture.

To her surprise, the boy ate the unsavoury portion set before him without a word of complaint. He was



58 STORIES OF NAPLES AND THE CAMORRA

pale and silent, and seemed to be thinking of other things.

"Where have you been all the morning?" she asked.

"In church, mother."

That was the last thing Lucia had expected to hear. Perhaps the boy's unwonted piety might partly explain the unexpected good luck that had happened to them. But, if the answer was satisfactory in some respects, it was inconvenient in others. As he had displayed no daintiness, she had intended to make his idleness the text of her discourse; but she could not scold him for going to church. His face was so sad, too, that it softened her; so, instead of denouncing his faults, as she had purposed to do, she began to talk very gently to him. She explained the position they were in, and without saying a word about Agniello's kindness she made him understand that they would have to work as hard and live as cheaply as possible.

"I don't mind how we live, mother," the boy replied, "now father's dead it hardly seems worth while living at all, and if you can find work for me I shall be very glad. I don't think I shall ever care to play again."

"Well, we'll see about that," said Lucia kindly, "but you're tired, and it's time for you to go to sleep now."

So Gabriele lay down on the bed. His mother thought he was taking his mid-day nap, but he had had that before, as we know, and now he was thinking over the things she had told him. As soon as the heat of the sun began to abate, he left the house without saying anything, and went in search of Agniello. He found him on the shore, among a group of fishermen. He would rather he had been alone, but his mind was quite made up, so he went straight up to him.



"I'm in trouble," he said, "and I want your advice."

It was a strange request to come from such a boy, but the fisherman saw how sad he looked, so he good-humouredly took his work, and seated himself in the shadow of another boat, at some distance from his companions.

"Well, my boy, what is it?"

"My mother's been talking to me."

"Ah," thought Agniello, "this comes of trusting a woman with a secret; he doubtless knows all about it," but he only said:—"What has she been telling you?"

"How poor we are, and, you see, I want to earn some money, but I don't know how to set about it. Of course it's no use discussing such things with a woman, and I want to consult some one; so I thought, as father's dead, you wouldn't mind giving me some advice."

"What do you want the money for?"

"To help mother, of course; she'll never be able to keep us both."

"And what work can you do?"

"I'd put my hand to anything. Of course I shouldn't be worth much now, but I should get of more use every year."

The fisherman nodded, and, thus encouraged, the boy went on—

"Do you know, I've been thinking, if anybody would take me on now, and give me just a little, so that mother and I mayn't starve, I'd promise to stay with him three years, and not to ask for any rise of wages till then. By that time I shall be worth my salt to any one, so it would be a good thing for him as well as for me. Only," he added rather dubiously, "I might die, and then he'd lose his money."

"Well, Gabriele, I'll consider the matter, and if you come to me to-morrow, I'll let you know what I think about it. And now, just go up to my house, and tell



60 STORIES OF NAPLES AND THE CAMORRA

my wife I sent you ; most likely your mother will be there, and there'll be some things you can carry home for her."

That night both Gabriele and his mother had a good supper at Agniello's, and on the following day the man said to the boy :

"I've been thinking over that plan of yours, and I'm half inclined to take you into my boat. You'd learn something there, but then you'd only be in our way for a long time to come. There's my wife, however ; she thinks you might be of use in looking after the children and running errands ; so, if you like, I don't mind giving you a month's trial. You'll work with me in the boat, and with her in the house, you see, and when the time's up we'll give you what we think you're worth, and see if it will pay to keep you on."

Gabriele was delighted with the proposal, and that very afternoon he was installed in his double office of nurse and fisherman, in both of which functions he gave more satisfaction than either of his employers had ventured to expect. He was not entirely unused to the sea, and, as he was active and intelligent, he gave the men less trouble than they had supposed, and before the month was out they found him a convenience instead of a burden, as there are a number of things that must be done in a fishing boat which take up time, though they require neither strength nor skill ; and they soon discovered that the boy could be trusted to do these thoroughly, even when they were not by. If he had been awkward and ill-tempered they would not have complained, for they shared their master's pity for the orphan ; so, as he was quiet and respectful, and always ready to do little services for any of the crew, he soon became a general favourite.

Both Agniello and Lucia remarked with some surprise that even in his free hours Gabriele never



returned to his old games. It was neither a good resolution, nor melancholy, which led to this premature seriousness. By becoming permanently attached to a boat, he felt that he had risen above his old playmates, and displayed a certain inclination to show off before them. They resented this, and, if one part of his occupation was calculated to excite envy, the other was open to ridicule. When he was grandly remarking that he was sorry he shouldn't be able to join in some plan of theirs, because he should have to be out with the boat, one of his listeners would ask whether he intended to take the baby with him, or if he had given her her pap before he came down to the shore. Such impertinent remarks excited the boy's wrath, and, after engaging in personal encounters with one or two of the chief scoffers, without putting an end to the jeers of his old companions, he dropped their acquaintance altogether.

He was still child enough to long for play, however, and, as boys cannot play alone, like girls, he might probably have compromised with his dignity, and returned to his former associates, a humbler, if not a wiser, boy, had he not found the society he wanted in his little charges. Michele was then four years old, a passionate, headstrong little fellow, whom his mother declared that no one could manage. He took a great fancy to Gabriele, who was never tired of making toys and inventing games for him, and, as the boy-nurse never asserted his authority, the child never thought of disobeying him. Gabriele cared less for Grazia, who was about two years older than her brother. He looked after her when he was bidden, did anything she asked him, and treated her kindly; but then a girl couldn't be his playmate, and he wasn't the boy to make a fuss about her. Now Grazia was Agniello's eldest daughter, and his great pet; she was accustomed to be treated with marked consideration by all the male visitors at the house, and so it



62 STORIES OF NAPLES AND THE CAMORRA

was something quite new to her to be pushed into the background in this way. Yet there was no denying that Gabriele was the most wonderful of boys, the cleverest, the kindest, the bravest and the funniest. His very neglect attracted her ; how she did wish he would take a little more notice of her.

One morning, when Lucia returned from Mass, she was surprised to find the child seated upon her threshold. Her face was preternaturally grave, she had a little tin pot beside her, and seemed to be squeezing something upon the doorstep ; but as soon as she saw the widow approaching, whatever she had in her hand went into the pot, and the latter was hidden behind her back.

"Why, what are you doing there ?" asked Lucia, as she opened the door and entered the house.

"Nothing," replied the child, without moving ; but as soon as the woman had seated herself to her work, she began to tap her pot against the stones, and look dubiously at her.

"I saw you doing something when I was coming up the street ; I wonder what it was ?"

"It's a secret, a great secret, I mustn't tell any one."

"Oh, but you can tell me, that won't matter, because I'm so old, you know."

"Oh, you're not old ; at least not very. You're not a thousand years old yet."

"How do you know that ?"

"Because if you were, you'd have grown young again, of course."¹

"Should I ? Then I must make haste to be a thousand, so that I may grow little, and we can have a good play together."

"Why, I shall be an old woman long before you're

¹ The proverbial expression, "Oh, yes, and if he lives to be a thousand, he'll grow young again," is used of a person indulging unfounded expectations.



a thousand, but I'll tell you what," said Grazia, advancing pot in hand, "I'll tell you what. When you're little, I'll be good to you, and take care of you, and let you do just what you like, if you'll only help me now."

"What is it you want, dear? I'll do anything I can for you."

"I want Gabriele to love me."

The child had come close up to the widow now, she was leaning her arms on her knees, and looking her full in the face.

"Well, he does love you, dear."

"No, he doesn't, not the least bit; but I want him to—and—and—the thing is, do you know the words?"

"What words?"

"You're sure it won't hurt if I tell you?"

"Quite sure."

"Look here," said Grazia, drawing a mangled cuttle-fish from her pot, "isn't it a big one? And I've squeezed its blood out all along the threshold—such a lot—and if I only knew the words when he came home he couldn't help loving me."

"I'll try and remember them," said Lucia, who at once recognised a common love-charm in the account of the child, and after a pause, she began to sing a Calabrian nonsense rhyme.

The child was delighted, the strange dialect seemed fraught with mystery. "Oh, thank you, thank you," she cried when the widow had finished, "I hope it's all right now, so I'll go home." But before she had reached the door she turned again, and said rather sadly, "They say it's no good if one talks about it. Well, I'll tell you what, if it doesn't work you must teach me the words, and then I'll come and do it all over again, quite alone."

Perhaps the fact that Grazia had talked about it lent the charm a greater effect than it might other-



64 STORIES OF NAPLES AND THE CAMORRA

wise have had ; for Lucia told Gabriele the story in the evening, and it both amused him and gained his heart. He began to take more notice of Grazia, and soon found her at least as amusing as her brother. The little girl was quite satisfied with her first experiment in sorcery.

Nevertheless, in a few days' time she again appeared before Lucia's door.

"I say."

"Well?"

"I want to talk to you."

"Come in then."

"I don't want to come in, you come out here."

The widow good-naturedly came to the door.

"You'll tell me the truth, won't you?"

"Yes, dear."

"Well, then, I want to know if you're a witch."

"Do I look like one?"

"I can't tell, I never saw one."

"What makes you think I'm one then?"

"Mother said you were."

"Mother said I was a witch?"

"Yes. I don't mean that she just said ' Lucia's a witch,' you see ; but I wanted to hear the words over again, and I asked her to sing them to me, and she said nobody but a witch knew them, and you knew them, you know. But I didn't say anything about it, and I won't."

"No, dear, I'm not a witch," said Lucia, both relieved and amused. "It's true it's mostly witches that know such things, but if you happen to hear one singing you may listen and remember the words."

"Oh, I see, I see," said Grazia, now venturing into the house. "Well, I'm glad you're not a witch, and now please sing me the words."

Lucia returned to her seat and did as she was bid. When she had finished the child resumed,



"When you meet that witch another time, you'll listen again, I dare say."

"Perhaps so."

"And if she was singing something that would make me rich, you'd try and remember it, wouldn't you? Because, you see, it would be good for you too; for then, when I'm married to Gabriele, you wouldn't have to mend old nets, but might sit all day long with your hands in your lap, and be glad that we were so happy."

In accordance with a suggestion of Agniello's, Lucia had had a letter written to inform her father of her husband's death, and the consequence was, that in a week or two her brother came to visit her. She received him kindly, but she rejected all his offers of assistance. She did not wish to be beholden to her relations, and in fact she no longer needed their help, as her string and washing gave the greatest satisfaction, and Agniello had kept his promise to provide her with all the work she could do. Still, to the end of her life she was glad he came, for there had hitherto been a coldness between herself and her father and brothers. Though she had submitted to the will of her family, she had never quite forgiven them the husband they had chosen for her; but now a complete reconciliation took place, and before he went away her brother presented her with an armchair, and his nephew with the finest suit of clothes he had ever possessed.

The years that followed were prosperous, but uneventful. The debt to Agniello had been repaid, and in due time Gabriele was released from the charge of the children; but the intimacy between the two families still continued. The fisherman had conceived a great respect for the widow; she never forgot that it was he who had come to her assistance in the hour of her need, and now that the great grievance of her life was removed, she became more cheerful



66 STORIES OF NAPLES AND THE CAMORRA

and sociable, and, as a natural consequence, the prejudice against her soon died away. As for Gabriele, he felt as much affection and respect for his master as if he had been his father, and Agniello always treated the boy he had helped as a member of his family, and was as proud of his progress as if he had been his own son. "He has a head full of brains," he would say to his associates, "and that is better than a purseful of gold any day in the year. Whoever sets upon him will be sure to win in the long run." His old boy-nurse was the only person with whom Michele never quarrelled, and Grazia still treated him with as much confidence and kindness as if he had been her brother, though long before she was twelve her ways had become demure and quiet, and she would have blushed and trembled at the very thought of a love-charm. Lucia still remembered the little incidents that have been recorded, however, and they served her as the foundation stone of a very pretty castle in the air. Grazia was exactly the daughter-in-law she would have desired, for she was quite without pretensions, and well versed in all the duties that devolve on a woman of her class, and yet it was certain that she would not come to her husband empty-handed. Gabriele was fond of her too, though it vexed the widow to remark that it was only in a quiet, brotherly way. At times she almost wished that some one else would make love to the girl and so wake him up; but in such cases, it must be confessed, the suitor she imagined was always one who was both unattractive as a lover, and ineligible as a husband. She had now and then thought of speaking to her son on the subject, but she never dared to do so frankly, and he was quite deaf to all hints. Well, they were both still young, and it was at least a comfort to know that Gabriele spent by far the greater part of his leisure at Agniello's house.

But the young fisherman had not much leisure



now. He was too ambitious to be satisfied with the thought of spending his whole life in his present position as a mere hand in another man's boat, and he knew that, if he wished to rise in life, he must exert himself more than his associates did, as his gains were too small for him to hope to succeed by saving alone. After he and his companions had returned from an excursion, they used to divide the fish they had taken as nearly as possible into four equal parts ; of these one and a half were assigned to Agniello as proprietor of the boats and nets, and another full share was allotted to him in his capacity of *padrone*, so that only one and a half remained to be distributed among the rest of the crew. Thus, while the elder fisherman was able to lay by a little money pretty regularly, Gabriele found that his gains rarely amounted to much more than thirty lire, even in a good month. He saw no injustice in this, it was the universal custom ; but it was clear that he must seek other sources of profit if he wished ever to become a *padrone* himself, so in his free hours he began to turn his attention to other branches of fishing.

This excited a good deal of comment among the neighbours, who by long custom had almost come to regard every separate species of fish as the exclusive property of those who devoted their lives to its capture. I don't know whether they thought that the eels and cuttles would consider it an indignity to be taken by a man who caught sardines and mullet as well ; but the elders shook their heads, and prophesied that, however things might look at first, the youth would soon find that his *nasse*¹ would remain empty, and that Agniello's proverbial luck had forsaken him. Even Agniello regarded the innovation with suspicion, though he was too much attached to his pupil to oppose his plans. But Gabriele went his own way,

¹ *Nasse* are basket-traps in which lobsters, eels, cuttle-fish, &c., are caught.



68 STORIES OF NAPLES AND THE CAMORRA

without paying any attention to the disapproval he was exciting, and, as the inhabitants of the deep did not display the coy resentment which had been expected of them, the clamour died away, and the prophets were glad that their predictions should be forgotten.

Now, among the friends of Gabriele's father, there was a man of the name of Giuseppe, who was considered the best diver for *latteri* in Mergellina. This is the most profitable of all the branches of fishing that can be carried on without capital, but it demands considerable strength and skill, as the fisher has to dive from his boat, and seek his prey with his hands at the bottom of the sea. Giuseppe was therefore treated with a good deal of consideration by his neighbours, and he might have made a comfortable living if he had not preferred sitting at the *taverna* table to groping about for shell-fish in the sand underneath his boat. He used to say that salt-water without demanded sweet wine within, and it was his invariable custom to drink a litre before beginning his morning's work. He called this lighting the engine fire, and declared it was the only safe way of counteracting the cold of the waves. Unfortunately, when he was once seated in his favourite corner, it required a strong motive to induce him to abandon it, and he frequently remained there all day long, emptying measure after measure with a slow persistency, so that no one could accuse him either of voracity, or of wasting his time. He never appeared to be either the better or the worse for the wine that he consumed, and he always spoke of intoxication with pity rather than contempt, as a disease to which none but children and the weakly were exposed, so that the only inconvenience which his self-indulgence brought upon him was a chronic want of money, as his earnings flowed with the utmost rapidity from his own pocket into that of the landlord. His wife had died young



and left him no children, so the neighbours thought it did not greatly matter, and, as he was always ready to share his bottle with them, he never forfeited their friendship and esteem.

It was in his favourite place of resort that he had met the Calabrian, whom he regarded with sincere respect, as the only rival in wine-bibbing he had ever met who put him fairly on his mettle, and, though he was somewhat disgusted to find that the son of his old crony, in spite of the pains that had been taken with his early education, showed no ambition to emulate the excellence of his father, he continued to take a good deal of friendly interest in the boy, and was always ready to do him a good turn. Encouraged by many proofs of his good-will, Gabriele, when he was about sixteen years of age, ventured to ask him to teach him the secrets of his calling. Giuseppe agreed to do so, but only on the condition that the youth should spend an hour every evening in the *taverna* with him. Gabriele made no objection, and it is but fair to say that on these occasions the elder man invariably paid the score. Gabriele soon learned all that his new master could teach him, but at the same time he convinced himself that he was physically incapable of attaining to anything approaching his proficiency. Giuseppe would not believe this. He had long regarded Agniello with as much envy and rivalry as his careless and generous nature was capable of feeling, and he had lately, in his day-dreams, enjoyed a foretaste of the triumph that awaited him on the day when his scholar should finally abandon his nets for the more manly, as well as more profitable, art of diving. He would not believe that things which he did with the greatest ease were impossible to the boy who had learned the first part of his profession so quickly, and loudly declared that the inability he professed was owing either to softness and cowardice, or to the stinginess with which he supplied the



70 STORIES OF NAPLES AND THE CAMORRA

internal fire, which could be fed only with wine. He endeavoured to stimulate his pupil's flagging energies by taunts and gibes, which the latter, who had exerted himself to the utmost, and was by no means pleased to find there was a form of fishing in which there was no chance of his becoming a master, in his turn, resented, and so the relations between the two, which had begun in kindness and gratitude, ended in irritation and coldness.

Yet even this episode in his career was by no means unprofitable to Gabriele. He has continued ever since to dive for *latteri* in the season when the weather is favourable and he has nothing better to do, and by this means he has often been able to add considerably to his monthly income. But the strange thing is that, though he has never risen above the average of divers, and cannot be compared—I will not say with what Giuseppe was, for his achievements have now become almost mythical—but with what a score of his successors now are, Gabriele is far more susceptible to a compliment on this point than on any other. His eyes will brighten still, and his cheeks flush, if you express your amazement at the length of time he can remain under water and the number of shell-fish he secures, whereas he remains entirely unmoved by your admiration of his fish-spearing, in which he has no equal in the whole Gulf.

About a year and a half after their estrangement from each other, Gabriele heard by chance that Giuseppe had been taken ill. Any resentment he may have felt towards him vanished at the news of his old friend's misfortune; he visited him immediately, and with Lucia's help nursed him through the serious attack from which he was suffering. All danger was over, and the patient was beginning to think of getting up again, when one evening, as mother and son were seated together at the door of their house, the latter said :—



"Do you think Agniello would lend me twenty-eight lire?"

"Why?" asked Lucia, who was shocked at the thought of his getting into debt, "what do you want them for?"

"Giuseppe will have to sell his boat."

"Poor man, that will be a hard blow to him!"

"Yes, mother, and that isn't the worst of the matter; the doctor says he'll never be able to dive again."

"How will he earn his bread then?"

"I dare say we shall be able to find something for him to do amongst us; we'll see about that when he gets well. But, as the boat is to be sold, I should like to buy it. I've been down to look at it, and it's well worth eighty lire. None will bid more than that for it. Perhaps I might get it for seventy-five, but I shouldn't like to beat him down, it would look as if we wanted to make a profit out of his misfortunes and what we've been doing for him, you see, and the boat's worth eighty."

Lucia nodded.

"But I've only got fifty-two; if I had stuck to the nets I might have had more ready money by this time, but I'm sure I was right in learning the other things as well. If I can only get the boat, you'll see I shall earn twice as much as any of the rest next year."

"But you couldn't do much with it alone."

"No, I should take Giuseppe into partnership. He wouldn't feel the fall so much if he stayed in the old boat, and, you know, we've worked together before. He'll soon learn how to lay the *nasse* alone, and can row for me when I go out fish-spearing. He'll be fit for all that kind of work, though he mustn't dive."

"He'll never be of much use; he's too fond of the bottle."

"Well, of course, if he doesn't mend, I shall have to get rid of him; but I should like to give him a

chance; he gave me one, you know. The only question is, whether you think I could ask Agniello to lend me the money?"

"I don't like you to borrow of him, he has always done so much for us without asking."

"But I should be able to pay him off very soon, and it may be years before such another opportunity occurs."

"Well, I always try to keep something against bad times; I was counting over my savings yesterday, and found I'd got thirty-four lire. I don't mind lending you twenty-eight of them, if you'll pay me back as regularly as you would Agniello."

"Of course I will, mother."

Lucia's hoard, in fact, amounted to more than three hundred lire, but she did not want her son to know that, lest it should make him extravagant, and, besides, she was proud of having a secret, and she loved the sight of the money.

Giuseppe knew that he would have to sell his boat to pay for the expenses of his illness; indeed he had mentioned the matter to Gabriele two days before the above conversation took place. It was not pleasant, but it did not affect him deeply. He had only to work hard for a month or two to be able to buy a better one, and he intended to work hard as soon as he was on his legs again. It was not till five weeks later, when he was as completely restored to health as he was ever likely to be, that the doctor told him he must give up diving. The fisherman was entirely incredulous, and found it difficult to treat his medical adviser with the respect his social station demanded. What a fool he must be, to think he understood anything about such matters! Had he said anything to his neighbours about it? Yes, doubtless that was the explanation of the long faces, the nods, and the whispers he had found it so difficult to understand. He would show them how mistaken they all were.



Next morning he rose early, and pushed off to the old fishing-ground. In twenty minutes more the boat was anchored, and he had stripped and plunged into the water. He had scarcely reached the bottom, before he was again obliged to ascend. He got into his boat, and sat there, gazing blankly at the two *latteri* he had almost mechanically seized. He had seen several more; why had he not stopped to take them? He hardly knew; his illness had weakened him more than he had supposed; he was out of practice, he must rest awhile, and then try again. The second attempt was a still more miserable failure. He had hardly entered the water before he was conscious of pains in his chest, and a choking sensation in his throat. He was obliged to return to the surface before he had ever reached the sand; he crawled back into his boat, and lay there with his face covered by his arms for more than half an hour. Then he dressed himself slowly, and rowed wearily back to the land.

He could not go home and sit there alone; he would pay a visit to the *taverna*. It was the first time he had been there since his recovery, and the landlord was far too good-humoured a man to have refused a bottle to so old a customer, even if he had not known that the boat would more than cover all the fisherman's liabilities; yet Giuseppe fancied there was more pity and less respect in his manner than there used to be. He took his old place, in which he resolved to remain all day. To-morrow would be time enough to think over his affairs; he would try and forget them now. He had hardly drunk a litre and a half, however, before he became completely intoxicated, and had to be led home and put to bed by two friends.

A relapse followed, and he was again in serious danger for a time, and in the weary days of convalescence he almost wished that Gabriele and Lucia

had let him die. What was he to do when he got well? His occupation was gone; he could no longer hold up his head among his companions, but must be content to earn a hard and precarious livelihood by helping to dry nets, and taking a hand at an oar now and then. And what a disgrace it was, that he, who had made it his boast that he was able to carry off almost any quantity of wine steadily, had been seen reeling through the streets at mid-day. The strong, joyous man was quite broken and gloomy. Even to his nurses he was sullen and morose.

One day, however, when he had been more than usually peevish to Gabriele, he was overcome by a sudden fit of penitence.

"I have been behaving like a brute," he said, "and to you who have been so kind to me;—but—but—forgive me, you do not know how wretched it is to have to live on without one ray of hope. I wish you had let me die. I should have died but for you and your mother."

Now that his lips were once opened, he poured out the whole bitterness of his heart. Gabriele listened in silence; but when the complaint was finished, he explained the plan he had formed, and Giuseppe, who only a short time before would have scouted the proposal, now accepted it with eager gratitude. From this time his health began to mend rapidly, and in a week he was able to begin his new calling. His spirit as well as his strength had been broken by his sickness and his reverses. He had no inclination to go to the *taverna* now, since he could no longer shine there, and he usually shared his young master's meals. He had become quite docile, too, and was anxious to please him in every way, for he had conceived a great affection for Lucia and her son. Indeed, he regarded the latter as the most wonderful of youths, and was as fond of boasting of his skill and cleverness as if they had been his own.



Experience proved the justice of Gabriele's calculations. From the variety of things to which he could turn his hand, it was only in very stormy weather that a day passed without his being able to earn something. By the end of the year he had put by what for him was a considerable sum, and everybody had begun to regard him as a youth of promise, who was certain to get on in life.

III

LAZZARONI AND GALANT'UOMINI

LUCIA was taller than most Neapolitan women. She was thin and had clear steel-gray eyes, which, at rare moments, seemed to glow with tenderness, but were usually simply quiet, like the water in a deep rocky creek, though they could become hard and even piercing. By the time when Gabriele bought his boat, his mother's hair had grown sparse, and was beginning to turn gray, but she was still as strong and agile as ever, and when the thin lips, which were usually kept firmly closed, were touched by a smile, you might almost have thought her young; and she smiled more often now than she used to do, for her mature years had been happier than her youth.

At first there had been many differences between her and Gabriele, for she was desirous, as we have seen, of asserting an authority to which her son would never submit; but as soon as she saw that he had really taken the right turn, she gave way. Long before he was eighteen he was undisputed master of the house; she treated him with as much deference as she had ever shown his father, and with considerably more affection. Gabriele, too, had by that time greatly modified his opinion of women. He entertained the most sincere respect, as well as love, for his mother,

and invariably consulted her on matters of importance. He was more gentle and thoughtful than men of his class usually are ; so the two lived together in perfect harmony, and Lucia was never tired of enlarging on the merits of her son. She called him her benediction, and said that in giving him to her the Blessed Virgin had so fully supplied all her wants that she had nothing left to pray for but that she would preserve him in health and strength.

Yet there was one part of his conduct which caused her deep anxiety. From his childhood Gabriele had taken a great fancy to the Church of San Giuseppe, and he still delighted in attending Mass and other services there. This was a cause of grief and grave apprehension to his mother. His father had always gone to Sant' Antonio's or to Santa Anna's, where she herself regularly went, and these were the proper churches for fishermen. Why must her son go running after strange saints? She did not wish to say anything disrespectful of St. Joseph ; he was doubtless an excellent saint in his way, and perhaps an elderly tradesman in easy circumstances could hardly do better than display a peculiar devotion to him. But what had he to do with fishermen? Their daily wants and trials lay quite outside the circle of his interests ; those were Santa Anna's, San Russo's, and Sant' Antonio's care, and must not they think it strange if one of their children kept running into other churches? It looked as if he thought they were not good enough for him.

Gabriele was so far moved by these representations that he took particular care always to visit Santa Anna's before going to San Giuseppe's. It might occasionally happen that he did not hear Mass at all, even on a Sunday or Saint's day, but he was never to be found in his favourite church before he had exhibited due respect and devotion for that of his mother. This silenced though it by no means entirely satisfied



her. She still viewed the whole matter with suspicion and was sure that nothing good would come of it. She had no wish to see her son particularly religious ; it was very well for an old woman like her to hear Mass every morning ; indeed, that was her simple duty, and she would have expected some evil chance to overtake her had she neglected it. But young men were not old women, and it was a bad sign when they tried to be like them. They were made different, and for her own part she had no doubt the saints judged their actions by quite a different standard. She therefore felt no anxiety when her son neglected to attend a religious service, but she could not understand what drew him to a place which was chiefly visited by another class than his own.

Gabriele himself would have found it difficult to explain his feelings. It was certainly no conscious and special devotion to St. Joseph which attracted him. If he had had any particular request to make, it would probably have been to Santa Anna that he would have addressed himself, particularly if it had been of a temporal nature, and it was to the priests who ministered at her altar that he gave the profits of the share in the fishery which he, like his companions, devoted to the use of the church. Perhaps his fancy for San Giuseppe's had at first been a mere childish whim ; perhaps the style of the building and the ornamentation, which was more quiet than that of the chapel his class chiefly frequented, exercised an influence over his imagination. At any rate his thoughts instinctively turned to that edifice whenever his devotional feelings were deeply moved. It was there that he had first felt soothed and comforted when he had been almost heart-broken by his father's death, and it was there his heart really melted with love and gratitude when any piece of good fortune happened to him, though he had first, of course, duly returned thanks at Santa Anna's. Thus the church

had gained an additional sanctity for him from its being associated with memories of all the important events of his life.

Yet at times he, too, felt out of place there in the midst of a congregation of well-to-do tradesmen with their wives and daughters dressed out in all their finery. So, as a rule, he avoided the eleven o'clock Mass, to which such worshippers usually came, as their devotions were assisted by music then, and the monotony of the service might be occasionally relieved by a glance at one's neighbour's toilette. One Sunday, however, he resolved that, for once, he would attend the High Celebration ; for he, too, loved music. He was early at church and took up a place near the door, where he thought he would be out of the way of the wealthier part of the congregation, who always took chairs near the high altar ; but to-day the lower part of the building became crowded, and after the service had begun he was obliged to rise from his knees to allow some late comers to pass. He glanced at them as they went by, and then remained standing to watch them. They were two girls, the eldest of whom might be fifteen, and the other perhaps two years younger, accompanied by an elderly woman, whom any foreigner would have taken for their servant, but whom Gabriele concluded, rightly enough, to be their mother. Antonetta, on whom his eyes were so fixed that he hardly noticed the others, was very small and slightly made ; she had jet black hair and eyes, and a complexion of clear transparent brown. The features were finely cut, and her mouth was small, but the lips were full and rosy. She was dressed in black, and not only did she wear a hat, but the tiny hands were neatly gloved. Gabriele had never seen anything half so pretty before. He stood there as if he had been in a dream until the service was over and she passed close by him again, with eyes demurely down-cast and the prayer-book clasped in both her hands.



On the following Sunday Gabriele again went to San Giuseppe's. He was there half an hour before the time, and took up exactly his old place. How long the minutes were! Would she come? Yes, there she was at last; but the church was emptier to-day, so that there was no difficulty in passing up it, and he could only get a single glimpse of her face. Still, he could see the back of her head bent down over the prayer-book. That was enough just now, and soon she would be going out again, and he could have a long look at her. He was even happier than he had dreamed, for in passing she raised her eyes for a single moment, and there was a smile in them. Next Sunday a still greater joy awaited him, for she let the rosebud she had worn in her breast fall at his feet. What more could she do? In a moment he had secured the precious flower and was following her, intoxicated by hope. He still, however, had sufficient good sense to saunter alone, some distance behind the little party he was watching, in order not to be observed. So that was the house where she lived—in what part of it was it? he wondered. As he went by a window in the first story opened, and the fairy form appeared for just a second on the balcony; but it was only to hang the cane screens over it, so that the air might have freer access to the room. She did not seem to notice the adoring face that was lifted towards her from the other side of the little street.

As far as Antonetta's own heart was concerned Gabriele felt that he had no cause to despair, but this only recalled to his mind the almost insuperable difficulties that lay in the way of the realisation of his wishes. According to the notions of his class he was quite in a position to marry. There was not a fisher in Mergellina who would have refused him his daughter. But he was divided from the object of his choice by the bitterest of class prejudices. It was not a question of money; now he came to think of it he

did not fancy Antonetta's parents were wealthy. Both she and her sister were well dressed, it is true ; but he knew that girls of her class often carry their dowry on their backs, and neither of them wore jewellery, while the mother's appearance was hardly better than that of many of the servants who attended the daughters of the richer tradesmen. The house, too, in which they lived was neither well situated nor imposing. No, they were not rich. Agniello would doubtless give each of his daughters a far larger sum at the outset than Antonetta was likely to bring, and then there was the share in the inheritance afterwards ; and Gabriele had little doubt that he might have Grazia for the asking. But he also knew that money is not the only thing parents consider in disposing of their daughter's hand. Everywhere there are differences of rank which it is hard to overleap, and in Naples these are very distinctly marked.

There are three distinct classes, or rather castes, which never intermix ; the old nobility, the *Galant'uomini*, and the *Lazzaroni*,¹ and in many parts of the city the two latter live side by side, and yet apart. They differ from each other in religious and political convictions, in morals, in social customs, in food and clothing. The former are generally liberal, or even radical, in politics, and the men affect either a rather watery rationalism or an open contempt for religion of every kind, though they have a strong prejudice in favour of believing wives and daughters, and always take care to make their peace with the Church as soon as they imagine their lives to be in danger, which they are apt to do as soon as they feel at all unwell. They live, on the whole, an indoor life, and keep their women in strict seclusion, never allowing the younger

¹ I use for convenience the names which the *Galant'uomini* have given, both to themselves and their enemies, without making myself responsible either for the praise or the blame which they imply.



of them to leave the house without some ancient crone to protect her, if it is possible to avoid it. They are fond of soup and eat comparatively little fish, and rarely raw vegetables. They dress themselves as well, or at least as showily and fashionably, as their means will permit, and their wives and daughters never go abroad without a hat or a bonnet.

The Lazzaroni, on the other hand, are strongly clerical in their opinions, and they have always cherished an affection for the old nobility and the House of Bourbon, which, however, is now fast becoming a mere sentiment. In the old days, their loyalty was frequently of supreme service to the Crown. It was they who flocked to the standard of Cardinal Ruffo in Nelson's days, and who put an end to the revolution of 1848. For the rest, they live chiefly in the open air, only retiring to their houses of a night, and allow their wives and daughters what, for the South, is a considerable amount of liberty, though they are merciless in punishing any abuse of it. They delight in garlic, shell-fish, raw vegetables and fruit. The men pay but little attention to their dress, and the women always go bareheaded. This, indeed, is the most obvious of the leading distinctions between the classes.

Both the peasantry and the fishermen have a distinct code of morals and a social system of their own, but their habits and sympathies are those of the Lazzaroni, and they often fraternise with them. Inter-marriages between them are by no means uncommon, and excite no surprise. But they and the poorer Galant'uomini regard each other with a strong aversion tempered with contempt on both sides. As is usual, these feelings are strongest among the women, and, though a vain fisher-girl may sometimes dream of a bonnet, the idea that any one who has been born to the right to wear it should of her own free will lay it aside is a thing unknown to history or tradition.



82 STORIES OF NAPLES AND THE CAMORRA

Gabriele knew all this far better than we can do—but then—but then— Must not Antonetta know it too, and had she not let the rosebud fall at his feet ?

In Naples, if a lover once knows the house in which the object of his passion lives, it is his own fault if, in a day or two, he is not perfectly acquainted with everything her neighbours can communicate about herself and her family ; for it is easy enough to enter into conversation with almost any one, and, if a neighbour should happen to suspect that it is something more than a general curiosity that prompted the inquiries of a stranger, that would not silence him, since it is always a pleasant amusement either to further or to frustrate a love-affair. Nothing else in the world, hardly death itself, excites so universal an interest. But then, Gabriele felt it would hardly be delicate for him to come forward personally in the matter, and he shrank from entrusting any of his friends with his secret. He thought, however, that he could trust the silence and discretion of Michele, Agniello's son, and people would be less likely to suspect a boy of twelve, than an older person, of any ulterior purpose.

Michele undertook the office somewhat sullenly, but executed it well, though the news he brought would hardly have had much interest for any one but an ardent lover. The name of the elder girl was Antonetta, that of the younger Giulia. Their father, Don Emilio, kept a linen-draper's shop in the Toledo. They had lived in the house about a year and a half, and had come to it from a larger and better one in the Pizzofalcone. Indeed, Don Emilio seemed to be sinking in the world, and it was even suspected that the girls helped to eke out the family income by needlework—at least the mother was frequently to be seen issuing from the house with a mysterious bundle. On such occasions she always locked her daughters in, and took away their shoes and bonnets. They



never went out, except to church on Sundays and saints' days, and perhaps twice or three times in a year for a drive in a carriage.

When Gabriele was in possession of this information, he had great difficulty in making up his mind what to do. He was by no means prone to hesitation, but he knew that a suit so strange as his was not likely to be granted, and to make it would only be to put Antonetta's parents on their guard. She would be watched more closely, and there would be no more smiles then, no more rosebuds. No, he would wait for a while. Perhaps some turn of fortune might favour him, and in the meantime he must be careful not to attract attention.

For this reason he did not haunt the street in which Antonetta lived, as he would have liked to do. Only once, on the Thursday evening, he ventured to pass along it, singing in his clear rich tenor :—

"Ti voglio bene assai
E tu non pienze a me."

But, if the girl heard and recognised the voice, she made no sign. This disappointed him more than he himself would have thought possible beforehand. He comforted himself by thinking that she was bound to guard their secret with double care, and perhaps her mother and sister were in the room with her ; and then Sunday was no longer so wearily far off as it seemed at the beginning of the week.

On that day, however, a second disappointment awaited him. Antonetta not only made him no friendly sign, but she fixed her eyes quite coldly upon him, as if she had never seen him before. What could be the meaning of this change? What had he done to hurt or offend her? Did she fancy, because he had as yet made no proposal, that he was not in earnest? She should not think that, at all events.



84 STORIES OF NAPLES AND THE CAMORRA

Gabriele, unlike most of his companions, could read and write a little, but he did not feel that his scholarship was equal to so momentous an occasion, so on Monday morning he made his way to San Carlo, under the portico of which the public letter-writers sit, and commissioned one of these to write a polite letter in his name to Don Emilio, informing him that he desired to have the honour of making his acquaintance. This was no sooner written, read over, and sealed, than he sent Michele to deliver it at the house. He had been obliged to take the boy into his confidence, but he consulted no one else.

We must now turn to Antonetta. Secluded as her life had been, she knew well enough that she was very pretty. She had heard the young men say so as she passed them in the streets, and her looking-glass told her that they spoke the truth. She was proud of it, too. It was the thing she liked best to think about, as she sat silently over her dreary daily task of needlework. And, as she was so very pretty, some day, no doubt, a rich merchant, or perhaps even a signore would come and take her away from the dark little lodgings to some great house, like the one in the Pizzofalcone in which they used to live. She would drive out every day in a carriage then, and go every evening to the theatre, and in the summer she would live in Sorrento, whose white houses, gleaming across the Bay in the bright sunset light, had from childhood fascinated her, as if the entrance to dream-land lay there. She would be very kind to Giulia, and have her with her very often, but not quite always. These were the things of which she would dream for hours, while the little fingers moved rapidly on, and the foundation stone of all these castles-in-the-air was, of course, the fact that she was very pretty. And yet, she had never quite felt the whole



meaning of the words until that strange new light flashed into Gabriele's face the first time he saw her. She dared not look round, but she knew his eyes were fastened upon her during the whole of the service. It was quite a new and pleasant feeling, and, when she sat down to her work again, she could not help wondering whether, and what, the young fisherman with the bright eyes was thinking about her. He had never been in church when she was there before, perhaps he would never come again; that was rather a dreary thought; so Antonetta rose and took just one peep at her face in the looking-glass. She was glad she was so pretty.

Next Sunday she could not keep her eyes fixed on the floor when she passed the youth, as she knew she ought to do, and that week his face, so full of loving adoration, got mixed up with all her dreams. Of course she never thought of him as a possible husband, she knew well enough they were hopelessly divided by their social position, and besides, was she not some day going to marry the rich merchant or signore who was to provide the fine house, and all the other nice things? She would be very fond of her husband, no doubt; but the young fisherman, too, must go on loving her, and follow her everywhere with his silent devotion, and she would be very kind to him, and let him kiss her hand now and then, and take him into her service, and so on, and so on. Out of such threads as these her silly little head wove a thousand romances, some of which were so sad that the tears came into her eyes as she pondered them over, and nearly blinded her to the quick movements of her needle. It almost seemed to her that Gabriele had really done all the things she had dreamed. His face surely had grown thinner and paler since the first time she saw it, and he must know that there could be no serious love, no marriage, between them. Why should he not also know that she too was a little



86 STORIES OF NAPLES AND THE CAMORRA

sorry for this? That was why the rosebud fell at his feet.

All the way home Antonetta's heart burned within her with the consciousness that he was following her steps, but, when she slipped out on the balcony, and saw him lingering on the other side of the street, she was overcome by a sudden dread. What would her father and mother say if they found out what she had done? What would the neighbours think if they noticed her strange admirer? And then, had she not heard terrible accounts of the lawlessness of the Lazzaroni, of their fierce jealousy, and the vengeance they took on the women whom they loved, if they could not obtain their hands? Giulia knew countless stories of this kind, and was ready enough to tell them as soon as her sister started the subject, and according to her it seemed that, if a man of that class loved a girl, and her parents interfered to prevent the marriage, he was bound in honour to gash her face with his knife on the very first opportunity, particularly if she had given him any encouragement. Nay, Giulia added that the women were proud of these scars as of so many testimonials to the passion they had excited. Antonetta passed the week in silent terror, and on Thursday evening, when she heard Gabriele singing in the street below, she shrank tremblingly into the farthest corner; and yet there was something in her heart that responded to the song. One thing, however, was clear; she must let him know as soon and as plainly as possible that his love was quite hopeless.

It was not till after this had been done that the revulsion of feeling came. As he stood there worshipping her beauty with his passionate eyes he did not seem terrible at all, and there was no rage, only hopeless wonder, in the look with which he met the unexpected coldness of her glance. He would never come to church again now, or follow her about any



more. That was just what she had wanted, was it not? Well, no, perhaps not quite that. At least, if it was, it was strange that she felt so much inclined to cry whenever she thought of it, and that was almost all day long. If it were only possible to explain it all to him! If ever they met again she would be kinder to him, but that would never be, no, never—never. That was the song with which she sang herself to sleep, night after night.

Gabriele knew that he would have some days to wait for an answer to his letter, for Don Emilio would have to make inquiries into his character and position; but the hours seemed cruelly long until Wednesday evening, when he received a note, saying that that gentleman would be happy to receive him at his house on the following afternoon, at four o'clock. There was nothing to be discovered from the letter. Whatever the father's views might be, the ceremony of invitation was one that he could not fail to perform without positive rudeness. But all now depended on his reception to-morrow. Had he been right to hurry on matters thus? Might not Antonetta have given him that cold look merely because her mother had noticed that he had followed them home last Sunday, and she wished to lay her suspicions to sleep? It was too late to consider that question now; yet he could not get it out of his mind.

Gabriele was punctual to the minute, and found Don Emilio waiting to receive him. He was a middle-aged man, with small, twinkling, uncertain eyes, a large mouth and full lips. His height might be some five feet six, and he was more than proportionately stout, but his complexion was sallow and his flesh seemed to hang loosely on his bones. His dress was showy, and had been arranged with evident care, and he was reposing in a studied attitude upon a sofa. As soon as Gabriele entered he rose, and,

stretching out one of his fat, flabby hands, he led him to a chair, with a mixture of condescension and cordiality. The conversation that ensued was not of the most lively character. Don Emilio was far more anxious to impress his visitor with a due sense of his importance than to place him at his ease, and, even if the youth's mind had not been so entirely pre-occupied with his own impending fate, it would have been difficult for him to feign any acquaintance with the state of the money market, the opera season, and the other subjects which his host introduced. In about ten minutes he rose to go. No word had been said about the purpose of the visit, but now the decisive moment at last had come. Don Emilio was profuse in his expression of delight at having made so agreeable an acquaintance, as he accompanied him to the door; but there, as if recollecting himself, he added:—"Will you not allow me the pleasure of introducing you to my family?" The change from doubt and fear to a joyous certainty was almost too sudden for Gabriele. The room seemed to rock like a boat on a stormy sea, and then Donna Agata was smiling graciously upon him, and there stood Antonetta, like a bashful child, half hiding behind her mother, with her eyes fixed upon the floor. She lifted them with a deep, serious, inquiring look to his, as he approached her, and a slight, half triumphant, half mischievous smile played round the corners of her mouth, as he lifted her hand to his lips. That was all, or nearly all, that happened. There were, of course, a few complimentary words to the parents, and then he left the house fully satisfied, for he knew that he was Antonetta's accepted lover, and that the etiquette of the Galant'uomini demanded that the further arrangements should be made by third parties.

Gabriele had hitherto prudently refrained from asking the advice of his friends, as he knew very well



what it would be, and had resolved beforehand not to follow it ; but he was now obliged to break the matter to his mother and Agniello, as he was resolved to entrust all business arrangements to the latter. The old fisherman shook his head when he heard the story, and would willingly have dissuaded his friend from the rash step he was about to take ; but, when he was informed how far matters had gone, he felt that an honourable retreat was at present impossible. The only hope was that some hitch might occur in the business negotiations, and it was for the purpose of making the fullest use of such an opportunity that he accepted the office entrusted to him. His benevolent plans, however, were entirely frustrated by Gabriele, who insisted on removing every difficulty as soon as it arose, by simply accepting all the proposals of Don Emilio.

The mother regarded the whole affair with a feeling closely approaching to horror. This was what those visits to San Giuseppe's had brought about. There seemed to her to be something unnatural and sacrilegious in such an attempt to break through the bonds of class prejudice, and the fact that Antonetta's parents should have given their consent to it rendered them the objects of her especial contempt and aversion. She did not say much about the matter at first, however, for it was her firm conviction that men ought not to be opposed, but managed, by women, and she knew that her words would be likely to have a greater effect if she did not speak till after she had seen Antonetta and her family. Till then she was content to second, to the best of her ability, Agniello's efforts to delay the marriage. The two were in perfect agreement, and frequent consultations took place between them, which were kept carefully secret from Gabriele.

At last they arranged their plan of attack. Don Emilio, after a good many attempts to escape the



90 STORIES OF NAPLES AND THE CAMORRA

necessity of a distinct answer, had finally refused to give Antonetta anything on her marriage. His money was invested in his business, and could be more profitably employed there than elsewhere. It would be for the benefit of the young couple that it should remain where it was, as his daughter would have her just share in the inheritance. The law secured her that ; but, if it were considered desirable, he was ready to enter into the most formal and binding engagement that it should be so. What the sum was likely to be he could not exactly say, and his vague hints that it would be considerable were far from imposing on the shrewd fisherman. At a hint from him Gabriele's mother seized on this opportunity of calling on her future daughter-in-law.

On her return, she found Agniello engaged in a warm discussion with her son. Don Emilio must be in sad straits, he argued, or he would never have given his consent to the marriage. Indeed, he had made inquiries through Don Antonio, a man of great influence, who was said to enjoy the full confidence of the Camorra, and found that his credit did not stand high. The only chance of getting anything out of him was to get it now. He was certain to give way if Gabriele remained firm. This, however, the youth positively refused to do. He would accept any arrangement on money matters that was agreeable to Don Emilio. After all, he had money enough by him to make whatever small changes were necessary in the household, and he could trust himself to support his wife.

On hearing this, Agniello left the house in indignation ; the mother, however, renewed the attack. She could not deny that Antonetta was pretty, very pretty, and no doubt she was a good girl ; but she was the worst possible wife for a fisherman. Even if she had been taught all that such a wife has to do, she had not the physical strength to do it, and she



seemed to have learned nothing but how to dress herself. It was like taking a child into one's house to take her. Men, who were always out of doors, did not know how hard a woman's work was. It was not only the washing and the cooking—the flax for the linen, and the string for the nets, had to be spun, and the house to be kept clean, and so on, and so on. Could Gabriele imagine Antonetta standing at a washing-tub with those little hands of hers, which were too white and soft ever to have done one day's hard work, or carrying down a basket of clothes to dry on the shore, or helping him to bring up the fish? And the worst of it was, she would come to it all with an ill-will, and always regret her marriage as a fall in life, and look down upon her husband and his poor old mother.

Gabriele felt there was some truth in what she said, and that her life, at least, would have been easier if he had chosen a fisherman's daughter; so he spoke soothingly to her. "After all, you know, you'll be here to teach and help her, and things can't go so very far wrong in the house when you are in it." The compliment pleased and silenced the old woman. She saw that her son's resolution was not to be shaken, and so—well, there was only a new trouble for her to bear, that was all. There was no use talking about it, and it was supper-time now.

Before they had finished their meal, Agniello returned. He, too, had made up his mind that further opposition was useless. He wished he had never had anything to do with the affair, but, as he had undertaken to represent Gabriele, he must see that his interests were protected—at least as far as his own folly would permit; and he now came to urge that Don Emilio should at least be requested to enter into the engagement he offered, to leave Antonetta her full share of his property; for he had discovered that she was not the shop-keeper's real, but only his

adopted, daughter. Donna Agata's first baby had died a few days after its birth, and she had sent to the Foundling Hospital for one of the same age and sex to take its place, and be brought up in her house as her own.¹ "Among us, of course," Agniello continued, "that would make no difference, but one can't tell how people of that sort may think and act." Gabriele agreed that it might be as well to press this point, though he insisted that it should not be made a pretext for breaking off negotiations.

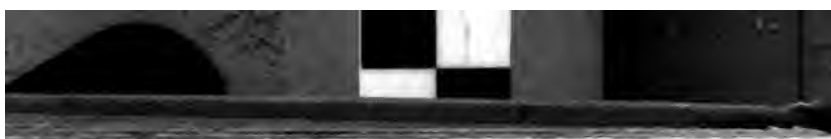
When he and his mother were again alone, she said, "I am glad you will not be Don Emilio's real son-in-law after all, for I dislike the man, and, if she is a daughter of the Madonna, let us trust that the blessing of the Madonna may rest upon her." She then embraced him, as she very rarely did, and every difference between them was at an end.

Agniello was right in thinking that Don Emilio must have been in sad straits before he consented to marry a child of his house to a fisherman. His father had left him a prosperous business, and he had married a wife with some property. At one time, indeed, he had occupied a respected position, and been the proprietor of several houses, and what, for the requirements of his shop, was no inconsiderable capital. As long as his father lived things had gone well with him, for the old man, who had made his own way in the world, was active, energetic, and prone to violent fits of passion. These Don Emilio was too indolent, too cowardly, and too good-natured to brave, and he soon found that his only chance of living in tolerable peace lay in attending to his duties.

¹ This custom is very general in Naples; indeed, among the lower classes it is considered almost as a religious obligation. Such children are called *figlie della Madonna*, and are generally supposed to be fortunate themselves, and to bring good luck to those who befriend them.



He was fond of being treated with consideration, and had formed a high opinion of himself, which he wished to preserve, so that the sharp remarks his father made whenever any irregularity occurred cut him to the quick. But as soon as this terror was removed by death he gave way to the bent of his disposition. He hated work, and had a strong aversion to being alone. There was almost always company in the cafés, and in one of them Don Emilio was almost always to be found ; but his intellectual powers were too sluggish to allow him to shine in conversation, and he was a stranger to the pleasure most Neapolitans take in hearing or telling some new thing. What he wanted was simply to feel himself in the presence of those who regarded him with respect, and these were chiefly to be found among men of smaller means and a lower social standing than his own. But even when he was seated among such associates the hours would sometimes seem wearisomely long : what were cards made for but to shorten them ? They brought quite a new sense of happiness into his life. The chances of the game were just what was needed to excite his slow mind to activity, for gambling was probably the highest intellectual pleasure of which he was capable. At first the stakes were not high, and, though they increased as the years passed and the lagging passion required a new stimulus, they never reached any extraordinary height. Poorer men might venture more on a single sitting without incurring the charge of extravagance, though it was gall and wormwood to Don Emilio when they did so ; but they only played occasionally, while hardly a day passed on which he did not devote some hours to his favourite amusement. Thus his losses formed a constant drain upon his income ; for he never attained to any great skill, and it was only a run of luck that brought money into his pocket. When his capital was exhausted, he began to borrow small sums upon



94 STORIES OF NAPLES AND THE CAMORRA

his houses, and he did this in such a shame-faced and imprudent way that they passed one by one from his hands without his receiving more than half their value. It was a great shock to his vanity when he was obliged to reduce his domestic expenses, and remove his family to a smaller house, in a less respectable neighbourhood. He then made a number of good resolutions, some of which necessity compelled him partially to keep ; but it was too late, his affairs were hopelessly involved. Thus things went on from bad to worse, until even Don Emilio, thoughtless as he was, was obliged to face the fact that in a year or two his last soldo would be spent, and nobody would be left for him to borrow from. That was not exactly a pleasant prospect for an indolent and self-indulgent man of more than fifty, though he had not imagination enough to realise the physical discomfort which real want would inflict, and to which he had never been exposed.

When Don Emilio received Gabriele's letter his first impulse was to curse the impudence of the sender. Had he then sunk so low that a fisherman could look upon his daughter as a suitable wife ? He would teach him his proper place. The only question was, whether it would be more in accordance with his dignity to return a frigid refusal or to make no answer at all. And yet, now he came to think of it, it would not be unpleasant to have a son-in-law, who, if the worst came to the worst, could hardly allow him actually to starve, and the Lazzaroni were said to be more dutiful than his own class in making provision for their parents. Perhaps it was some young fellow who had fallen violently in love, as men of that class were apt to do. If so, what a fool he must be to write to him about it ! Marriage was clearly out of the question—and yet such a suitor would have his advantages ; it would be easier, for example, to settle any question of dowry with him. He wondered whom



Antonetta would marry. He wished it had been a shop-keeper of substantial means who had applied for her hand, but such men were not reckless enough to marry only to please their eyes. It was rather a pity, perhaps. If Don Emilio had been given to self-examination, he would have been surprised to find himself regarding the vagaries of passion with greater indulgence than he had felt for them even in the hey-day of his youth. Well, but who else was likely to demand Antonetta's hand? She was pretty, and clever with her needle, and when the crash came she might succeed in finding service in the family of some lady of quality, and then, if she were clever and fortunate, marry the butler or the footman. In that case, there was no chance of her ever affording him much assistance. Or suppose a young shop-keeper fell in love with her. He must be without parents and guardians, or they would interfere to prevent his imprudence, and such young men were usually without means as well. And this young fisherman—if his passion was really so violent as the strange step he had taken seemed to imply, of what wild act might he not be guilty if he were thwarted? It might be necessary to take precautions against his vengeance. Don Emilio began to feel a certain curiosity with respect to him: there could be no harm in making inquiries, and, on the whole, he was glad he had not teased Antonetta about the uncouth admirer she had gained, as he had at first felt inclined to do.

By the following evening he had begun to regard Gabriele's proposal in a far more favourable light. The information he had gathered about him was full and exact, and from it he concluded that he was not a youth who would be likely to let his father-in-law starve in the streets. And, after all, what stood in the way of the match but an absurd class prejudice? Don Emilio was an enlightened man, who had always professed himself desirous of doing away with all the



96 STORIES OF NAPLES AND THE CAMORRA

distinctions of rank which divided him from those above him, and he could therefore represent the marriage to his companions as a disinterested sacrifice to his democratic principles. The two young people had been violently in love with each other, of course, and he had not felt justified in opposing their wishes merely because Gabriele—who was a most worthy young man—belonged to a class that was usually considered below his own. That would be an excellent answer to all objections. Yes, he would accept the offer. Poor Antonetta! She would find the rough life a little hard at first, but she would soon get used to it, and, if he refused, what better future was there in prospect for her? To do him justice, he never consciously remembered that she was not his own daughter, though possibly he might have felt the sacrifice a little more keenly if it had been Giulia and not Antonetta who was to be the victim.

As soon as Don Emilio had made up his mind he announced his resolution to his wife. He never consulted her on any question, nor expected any opposition from her. Their life together had been quiet and comfortable; he hated strife almost as much as he hated trouble, and left the whole management of the children and the household to Donna Agata, who, on the other hand, forbore to make any inquiries as to his outdoor pursuits. She had no doubt that he led an exceedingly staid and regular life; for he was fond of sleep, and therefore always came home early. They had sunk in the world, no doubt, but that was owing to business losses, and the fewer questions a woman asks about such things the better, as she is certain not to understand them. Still, she was startled when she heard that her husband intended to marry Antonetta to a fisherman. He merely told her he had reasons for the step which he could not explain at the moment, and bade her break the matter to their daughter.



We already know the reason why Antonetta was a good deal less surprised and shocked than her mother had expected her to be, when she was informed of the strange resolution her father had come to and the future that was in store for her. She was, however, very anxious to know a good many particulars as to the age and looks of the fisherman whose wife she was to become, which Donna Agata, in her surprise at the unprecedented nature of the proposal, had quite forgotten to ask. It did not much matter, did it? He would call to-morrow afternoon, and then she could judge for herself. In her heart the girl never had a doubt as to who it was who had claimed her hand. He had not been repulsed by the hard look she gave him; he was not lost for ever. How clever he must be to be able to persuade her father to consent to such a match, and without even mentioning the rosebud; for, if he had said anything about it, her mother would have been sure to scold her. Of course it was not just the marriage she had dreamed of; there were some things she would have to give up, but then the rich merchant and the elegant signore had always been rather dim and distant personages, and during the last few days Gabriele had become very near and real. How he must love her!

All that night she kept her secret, but next morning she could not refrain from telling her sister as much of the story as her mother knew. Giulia received the news with indignation.

"Oh, Netta, you'll have to go without a bonnet, and wear those hideous clothes, and wash, and make nets, and carry fish, and whenever his dinner's badly cooked, or he's out of humour, he'll cut you all over with his knife."

"But what can I do? Father consented without asking me."

"If he wanted me to marry a fisherman, I'd poison him rather than yield."



98 STORIES OF NAPLES AND THE CAMORRA

This forcible declaration put an end to the discussion for the moment, but all through the morning the younger sister kept making querulous remarks, such as—"You know I shall never be able to visit you, now you are going to live among that rough set," or, "What will people say, when they hear I have a sister who does not wear a bonnet?" But at last she was silent for a long time, and then, just as lunch was ready, she rose, threw her arms round her sister's neck, kissed her passionately, and said—"Netta, it's very, very sad, but if you are murdered, and father doesn't take any steps in the matter, I'll go and tell the police myself—no one shall stop me."

Antonetta had no great confidence in Giulia's judgment; yet such talk wearied and depressed her and awakened some of her old fears. But, when Gabriele stood before her, and she felt his hand tremble as it touched her own, all her doubts vanished. She became suddenly and gladly conscious that she had power over this rough, strong man, and, what was better, that she could trust herself to his keeping. Yet it was rather funny that he should look up to her in that way—he the rough, strong man.

When Gabriele left the house he knew very well that he must not call again before Antonetta was his own, but still a few harmless liberties were allowed him. He wrote to her once or twice, in a rude, sprawling hand, but with a quill dipped in his own blood. Giulia shuddered when her sister showed her the first of these notes, but Antonetta made a little pocket inside both her day and her night dress, so that she might wear them constantly close to her heart. Of an evening, too, he might come and stand beneath the balcony, and she would steal out upon it and whisper a few words to him. They could not talk much, or tell each other any great secrets, for her mother was seated at the window-sill, and all the



neighbours, you may be sure, kept their doors and their ears open. Still, in those short half-hours they learned to call each other by their Christian names and to exchange the distant *voi* for the familiar *tu*. At other hours, too, Gabriele would sometimes pass the house, when his heart was too full to let him rest elsewhere, and then he would strike up a song, and Antonetta would join in it, but in a voice so soft and low that hardly any one but he could hear it. They saw each other in church on Sundays, of course, and twice they managed to touch each other's hands among the crowd, in a way that no one else could see. In a word, they did not meet as perfect strangers on their wedding morning.

In the meantime Gabriele found a pleasant occupation for his leisure hours in preparing his house for the reception of his bride. Hitherto he and his mother had occupied a single room on the ground floor. It had only one small window, but it possessed two doors. The larger of these, which opened directly into the street, was never closed in the daytime, when either of the inmates was at home, except in unusually cold or stormy weather. The second, which had hitherto been kept locked and barred, communicated with a narrow passage that led directly from the street to a steep flight of stone steps. The room itself was spacious, though rather dark and gloomy when the front door was shut, and if Gabriele had married a girl of his own class, it would have been deemed ample for the requirements of the enlarged family, or at most a closet would have been taken where the nets might be stored, instead of being piled, as they now were, in the corner furthest from the window. Such a closet was to be found at the top of the steps already mentioned, and opposite it was a room exactly corresponding to the one below, except that it had only one door and two windows,



100 STORIES OF NAPLES AND THE CAMORRA

which overlooked the street, so that it was both brighter and quieter. Agniello was shocked at the extravagance of his young friend when he heard that he had taken the whole of the upper story in addition to the room in which he had been born and bred, but ever since his visit to Don Emilio's house Gabriele had been convinced that his wife would require some place for herself, which she could keep tidier than the general room, and in which she would be comparatively free from his mother's authority. Lucia might still sleep below, as she had always done, and there the cooking and such household work as could not be transferred to the street might be carried on, but above, Antonetta was to be queen, and the youth did his utmost to adorn her little kingdom for her. He knew that her father ought to have paid for the new furniture, but it was not her fault that he refused to do so, and it was his part to see that she suffered as little as possible from the omission. It was not a great matter—a large bed, a table, a few rough chairs, a chest of drawers on which was placed a gaudy new image of Sant' Antonio, surrounded by paper roses and covered with a glass case, a rough coloured print of the Blessed Virgin, with a little oil lamp burning continually before it—that was all, and yet Gabriele was proud of his work, and delighted himself with thinking what Antonetta would say when she saw it.

Lucia watched all these new arrangements with a somewhat mournful interest. Perhaps she was a little jealous of her daughter-in-law, and feared that she would not love her son as well as he deserved; but she had made up her mind that it should not be her fault if the marriage were not a happy one. So, when Gabriele had finished his preparations and left the house, she carried her old arm-chair into the upper room, as a tribute to his future wife. It was the one her brother had given her when he visited her after her husband's death. No fisherwoman in the



neighbourhood possessed one like it, and she was very proud and fond of it, but she had nothing else to give, for Gabriele had been so liberal with his money that she did not think it would be prudent for her to draw on her own little store, which might be sorely needed if any misfortune should occur.

So, at last, the evening came when Gabriele led his newly married wife into the home he had prepared for her. Antonetta had never before quite realised the greatness of the change that had come over her life. The vaulted, gray walled room and the uncouth furniture filled her with terror. She hid her face on her husband's shoulder, and burst into tears.

"Why, Netta, what is the matter?"

"Oh, love, it is all so new and strange," she sobbed. "I don't know what I shall have to do. When I make mistakes will you always be patient with me, and forgive me?"

"Always, always;" and he sat down upon his mother's chair and took his bride upon his knee, and kissed and soothed her, as best he could. It was not what he had expected would happen when his wife first entered her new home, but perhaps the little scene drew them closer together than a merrier one might have done.

The girl's depression soon passed away. There was so much in her new surroundings to attract her curiosity and excite a smile, though from the first she had tact enough to conceal the latter, that it was impossible for a girl of her years and temperament not to feel amused. For the first week, of course, she was obliged to remain within doors, and Lucia would willingly have waited upon her as if she had been a real lady, but she insisted on trying her hand, often awkwardly enough, at every kind of work that had to be done in the house. This delighted Lucia, who could not know that her daughter-in-law looked on it all as a game of play, and who therefore, before the



102 STORIES OF NAPLES AND THE CAMORRA

week came to an end, had begun to think that her son had not made such a bad choice after all. Antonetta's merriment, however, reached its height on the day where her new out-door life began, with a drive in a two-horsed carriage with her husband to the church of the Madonna del Carmine, at the other end of the town. She felt as if she were dressing for a masquerade when she put on the clothes she was henceforth to wear ; she did nothing but laugh and jest with her husband all the way to Mass ; even the service did not quiet her, and on their return the showers of sweetmeats which all his friends rained down upon the carriage as it passed their houses increased her mirth. In the evening she was as frolicsome as a kitten, and both Don Emilio and Donna Agata felt as if they had never before really known their daughter.

IV

VENDETTA

THE first year and a half of Gabriele's married life passed very pleasantly and quite uneventfully. His mother soon learned to love Antonetta, who brought quite a fresh life into the house, and did her best to adapt herself to her new surroundings. She had a great deal to learn, of course, and at first made many mistakes ; but she herself was always ready to laugh at them, and she did this so heartily and good-humouredly that even a less patient and kind-hearted person than her mother-in-law would have found it difficult to be angry with her. Many of the tasks which usually fall to the share of a fisherman's wife were, it is true, obviously beyond her strength, and these the elder woman continued to perform, but she was so neat and economical, and such a good needle-woman, that Lucia told her son that if he were obliged



to hire other people to do them in the years to come, when she herself was past work, he would, even in money matters, be no loser by the wife he had chosen, since she could earn more by dress-making than their wages would come to.

Antonetta, too, was thoroughly happy. She was so light-hearted and full of fun that the strange new life almost seemed like a comedy, in which any little trouble or difficulty that might occur was, after all, only a thing to be laughed at. She was far freer, too, than she had ever been before—freer than even her new companions were; for, if she were guilty of a breach of etiquette every now and then, such as running down to the shore to jest with her husband when he was seated there in the midst of his male associates, the men thought the indecorum charming in so bright a young creature, and the women only smiled at it, as a proof of her ignorance and want of breeding.

It was not often, however, that Gabriele was to be found on the sea-shore now. He spent so much of his free time at home that his mother began to doubt whether such domestic habits were quite manly, and his companions used jocosely to assert that he was adopting the manners and morals of his wife's class. He was too good a fisherman, and both he and they knew it too well, for there to be any sting in such pleasantries, and Antonetta was very proud of her ability to keep him so often and so long beside her. The happiness of the little household reached its height when the first baby was born. If Gabriele was a little disappointed that it turned out to be "only a girl," he kept the matter to himself, and before three days were passed he had learned to regard it as the most charming and perfect of infants.

The neighbours, of course, at first viewed the marriage with strong disapproval; but they soon became reconciled to an event which it was obviously impossible to change. I doubt whether it ever



104 STORIES OF NAPLES AND THE CAMORRA

greatly injured Gabriele in their opinion. What he had done was certainly foolish, and perhaps wrong, but then, it was difficult as well, and they felt quite as much inclined to wonder at his success as to blame him. With Antonetta the case was different, and she was at first very coldly received, particularly by the women of Mergellina. But she was sensible enough to take this in good part, to attribute it to envy, and look upon it as an indirect kind of flattery. She was so full of jests and stories, and had come from so different a social sphere, that the girls and younger wives soon began to find her company amusing, while her goodnature and helpfulness gained the hearts of those who were more advanced in years. Agniello and his family held rather aloof for a week or two, but Michele could not be prevented from running in as usual. The stories he told about Antonetta excited the curiosity of his mother and sisters, and as soon as they met, Grazia, who was sure she should hate her, took a great fancy to her, and so the relations between the families became more intimate than they had ever been.

Though Antonetta was necessarily excluded by her marriage from the class in which she had been brought up, she remained in friendly connection with her parents. Whenever he met Gabriele, Don Emilio was grand and gracious, for he was fond of being both, and he wanted to impress the young man's mind with the conviction that he possessed the kindest and most dignified of fathers-in-law; a man, in fact, whom it would be both a pleasure and a privilege to support, if ever misfortune came upon him. Donna Agata was still more pressing in her attentions. Love of the child she had reared from babyhood would alone have prompted her to visit her in her new home; but she was surprised to discover that such visits were by no means disagreeable. The rough plenty of the fisherman's house formed a



contrast to the neat penuriousness of her own. It was pleasant to have new acquaintances to chat to, and still pleasanter to feel that she was displaying an amiable condescension in so doing. For many years she had had so few opportunities of condescending that she enjoyed it now with quite a new zest. She saw, too, that Antonetta was happy, she noticed that Lucia was very careful to prevent her over-working herself, or doing anything which might injure her health, and she was duly grateful to her for this, though she said nothing about it. In fact, the two elder women took a liking to each other, and a kind of friendship sprang up between them. On the baby's birth, it is true, this harmony was somewhat endangered by their differences of opinion as to the best way of taking care of it; but, after several warm altercations on minor points, they found themselves entirely at one on the most important question, that its natural food ought to be supplemented by a pap made of soaked bread beaten up with olive oil, and even in the heat of a debate they had suddenly forgotten their differences, to scout with the whole weight of their united authority Gabriele's suggestion that a few drops of wine would certainly be good for the little thing. In short, Donna Agata regarded her daughter's strange marriage with a satisfaction which she would have considered quite impossible when it was first proposed, and this increased her reverence for her husband's judgment.

Giulia, however, still viewed the matter with all her old horror. Once, and only once, her mother succeeded in persuading her to visit her sister; she came back with her prejudices strengthened and confirmed, and the worst of it was that a vague dread now began to be mixed with her disgust. She would rather die than live such a life as that—so she told herself over and over again; and yet, might not just that life be in store for her? She was quite alone

now ; she had nobody to trust to. Her very mother had become a companion of Lazzaroni, and, since her father, for some inexplicable reason, had treated Antonetta thus, might he not do the same by her when the time came? She would marry any one, however poor, or old, or ugly he might be, to escape from such a fate. But then, what respectable man would think of marrying a girl who was sister-in-law to a fisherman? Her whole body tingled with shame whenever she thought of it, and she shrank from everything that reminded her of the indignity. Not that she had ceased to love Antonetta. Whenever she visited her old home, Giulia welcomed her with more than her wonted affection, and would take her aside, and talk to her about all the little things that had once been of supreme interest to both. But she never would listen to any account of her sister's new way of life, and seldom allowed her to leave without indulging in a hundred querulous complaints as to the wrong that had been done them both, which Antonetta had to laugh away before she endeavoured to soothe her.

One of Giulia's great grievances was that she occasionally met Gabriele or his wife in San Giuseppe's of a Sunday ; for those meetings proclaimed her shame to all the world. She entreated her mother to choose some other church, but this Donna Agata positively refused to do, as such a change might offend her son-in-law. He would think they were ashamed of him. Giulia hesitated for a time, but at last she summoned up courage to speak to Antonetta about it, and to beg her not to come to San Giuseppe's, and to keep Gabriele away. Antonetta promised to do as she wished, and she did it ; but from that time she ceased to feel any strong affection for her sister.

Even Antonetta had some difficulty in weaning her husband from his favourite church. She could tell



him the reason of her unwillingness to go there, and it both surprised and vexed him. To attend Mass at San Giuseppe's had from childhood formed a part of his way of keeping every festival, and the hours he had passed there of late had been the happiest of his life; for the building recalled a thousand little incidents to his memory, and his heart was filled with thankfulness as he glanced fondly on the wife who knelt beside him. He could not understand that she should not feel as he did in the matter, and, though the difference did not grow into a quarrel, he was a good deal hurt by it. Antonetta, too, found she had made a real sacrifice to gratify the unreasonable prejudices of her sister, for she had been proud that her husband should take her to church and remain with her there, which the fishermen rarely do, and now he gave up that habit altogether.

In the whole course of his life, Don Emilio had never displayed so much foresight, tact, and self-restraint as he did, firstly, in procuring a son-in-law to provide for him when the days of trouble should come, and, secondly, in training him for that honourable office. He was not, however, destined to reap the fruits of his exertions, for about a year and a half after his daughter's marriage he fell ill and died, leaving his affairs greatly involved. His books were ill-kept and entirely out of order, so that lawyers had to be employed and a considerable time elapsed before it became clear that the property he left behind him would hardly be sufficient to cover his debts.

The family arrangements were far more easily made. Gabriele, Antonetta, and Lucia would all have preferred to live alone together as they had hitherto done; but, circumstances being as they were, it never occurred to any one of them to doubt that Giulia and her mother would henceforth form a part of their household. Donna Agata thankfully accepted the offer, but her daughter, to the surprise of all,

rejected it. She felt that the turning point in her life had come, and that she must act decidedly, if she did not intend to sink at once and for ever into the ranks of the Lazzaroni. She therefore appealed to a step-sister of her mother's, who was married to a shop-keeper, and herself had a small millinery business, and found no difficulty in obtaining employment from her. Giulia was to live with her aunt and work in her workshop, and for this she was to receive board and lodging, and a very small monthly salary. Her mistress assured her that this was an exceedingly liberal offer for a girl of her age, and that she was only induced to make it because she wished fully to recognise the ties of relationship between them. She said something of the same kind to her own heart as well, but when her husband charged her with being extravagant in her charities she immediately remembered that the girl, young as she was, had a very unusual share of good taste, and an extraordinary deftness with her needle. "So, so," said her husband, "that is the secret of your generosity; a soldo for your niece, and two into your own pocket," and he burst into a hearty laugh.

"Well," replied the wife, "it is pleasant to turn an honest penny by doing good to others. And you," she added, joining in the laugh, "you, at least, have no cause to complain, for you get all the good of it in the end."

To Giulia the terms seemed hard enough, but they at least saved her from a prospect that was quite intolerable; so she accepted them.

Donna Agata was quite subdued by her misfortunes, and very thankful for the refuge that had been provided for her. She tried to do whatever she could in the house, was anxious to please Gabriele, and deferential to Lucia. She bore her sorrows silently, and forbore from interfering in any way with the old family arrangements. And yet her presence did make a difference. It awed Antonetta, for example.



When her mother was there, she did not feel at all inclined to indulge in the wild outbursts of girlish mirth, to tell the funny little tales, and sing the strange scraps of song, that had made life in the house so bright and cheerful. She grew quite staid and quiet, and seemed suddenly to have become much older. So Gabriele remained out of doors oftener and longer than he used to do ; and, if he was still to be found at home more than most of his neighbours, it was habit and a vague sense of duty, rather than mere pleasure, that kept him there. His wife did not complain ; she knew she had no cause for complaint ; but now and then, of an evening, she would find herself gazing across the Bay at the white houses of Sorrento and smiling rather sadly at the memory of her old dreams.

So more than a year passed away, and Giulia still held aloof from her sister and her brother-in-law ; but her mother visited her frequently, and generally brought some little present of fish to her mistress. The girl was now in the flower of her youthful beauty, far taller, fuller, and statelier, than Antonetta had been. Her mother wondered how she could dress as she did, though she knew her wages had been increased of late ; but she supposed a knowledge of the trade enabled her to get the materials cheaply, and that she spent her nights in making them up. That was what Giulia told her, and she did not like to press the matter, lest her daughter should think that she wished her to give her any part of her earnings. Her aunt was loud in her praise and seemed perfectly satisfied with her conduct. There was no reason to be uneasy. Still the mother's heart misgave her one day, when she met her daughter unexpectedly in the street and saw that she was wearing a gold watch, a chain, a brooch and earrings. What was she doing there, and where did the finery come from ? Giulia was only going to spend a half-holiday, which her

aunt had given her, with a friend whose saint's day it was, and one of her companions had lent her the ornaments for the occasion. There was nothing improbable in the story, and Donna Agata was relieved to see that the girl who accompanied her was very plainly and quietly dressed. Still she must speak seriously with her upon the subject. She would do so on the first opportunity.

That opportunity never came. A few evenings later, Gabriele happened to pass San Carlino just as the play was finished, and amongst the crowd that was issuing from it he caught a glimpse of a lady. She was richly dressed, and hung upon a gentleman's arm, and yet it surely must be Giulia. He called her by her name, and pressed forward to obtain a better view of her. The girl did not turn, but her companion felt her arm tremble on his, and, after lifting her into the closed carriage that was waiting for them, he turned suddenly round and struck the fisherman a violent blow with his fist, at the same time calling him *fetente*, perhaps the strongest of all Neapolitan terms of abuse. Two policemen immediately sprang forward, the carriage rolled away, and Gabriele was pushed back into the crowd. His whole form trembled with indignation. He was by no means sure that he had not been mistaken in his suspicion; in that case he knew his conduct had been rude, and, if the gentleman had only struck him, he would have borne him no ill-will; but the insult demanded revenge. Yet he was unable to gather any information as to the person of his assailant, and his own attention had been so entirely concentrated on the lady that he knew he should not recognise him, even if they met.

Next morning, when he returned from his fishing, he found his wife and his mother-in-law in tears. When he asked the reason, they showed him a letter, written by Giulia, in which she said she was sorry to bid farewell to her mother and sister, perhaps for



ever, without even seeing them first ; but, if she had come to visit them, they would only have teased her by trying to dissuade her from acting as she had now done. She had gone to live with a signore who loved her, and whom she loved. He could not marry at present, it was true, but she was prepared to trust him and to wait. They would think her wrong in this, but that was only because they did not know how good he was, how faithful he was sure to be. After she was married she would come and see and take care of them all ; but that might not be for years. In the meantime they were not to be anxious about her, but only to be glad that she was so happy.

As soon as Gabriele had read the letter, he folded it, put it in his pocket, and left the house, without saying a word. When he came back he returned it silently to Donna Agata, at her request, and, on his wife's trying to introduce the subject when they were alone, he simply told her it was no use talking about it, in a tone that she had never heard before, but instinctively felt she must obey. She afterwards learned from Grazia that he had been with her father all the morning, and that immediately after the conference Agniello had taken a small boat and rowed away in the direction of Santa Lucia ; and now, to the horror, shame and disgust which the step her sister had taken caused, there was added a vague apprehension that some great evil was at hand, which threatened her own life as well. The dread was increased by the fact that she was obliged to bear it alone. For the first time since her marriage there was a subject on which she dared not speak to her husband, and she shrank from mentioning it either to his mother or her own.

There was no use talking of the matter, that was what Gabriele felt as soon as he had made out the meaning of the letter. Women might chat about,

and cry over such things, but it was a man's part to act. He knew very well what he had to do now, but the means of doing it were not so clear. That was why he consulted Agniello, whom he knew he could trust. Both agreed that the first thing to be done was to discover the name and the habits of Giulia's lover, and that, for prudential reasons, they should try to find out where the girl herself was at present. Don Antonio was the only man who could be of any great use in these inquiries. Agniello undertook to consult him at once, as it was best that Gabriele should appear as little as possible in the matter at present. Don Antonio knew nothing about Giulia, girls were the most uninteresting of human beings to him, and love-affairs the transactions in which he most rarely interfered, but he noted down a number of particulars and promised to supply the desired information before the end of the week ; and he kept his promise.

On Saturday afternoon Agniello was able to inform Gabriele that Giulia was living, under an assumed name, in a small, but well-furnished, suite of rooms, near Capodimonte. She rarely went out, except to walk in the park, or of an evening to visit some theatre ; and, when she did so, she was always attended by a plainly dressed servant girl. Her lover was her only visitor, and he passed as her uncle. He was a colonel, whose services had been rather distinguished ; he was married to a wealthy wife, and had lately inherited, rather unexpectedly, a considerable estate. His wife was sickly, indeed the doctors thought she could hardly live through the year, and he treated her with great attention. On Sundays he always accompanied her to the church of San Francisco di Paoli, on Monday and Thursday evenings they generally went together to the Villa, where she sat beneath the trees, close to the wall that divided the promenade from the sea-shore, a



little sheltered from the crowd and the light, to receive the compliments of her husband's friends, who on those days made a point of being there to pay their respects to her. The Colonel visited Giulia almost every afternoon ; he usually returned by the Toledo, and drank a glass of vermouth in the Grand Café before dinner. He was a tall man with grizzled hair and a sabre scar on his right cheek. If any further particulars were required, Don Antonio would do his best to supply them.

Gabriele thought the information he had received sufficient. On the following morning he was in the church of San Francisco at half-past ten, though he knew that the High Celebration did not begin till eleven, for he wanted to see the Colonel come in before he got mixed with the crowd. Yes, that was he. Gabriele found a place from which he could watch him closely without being observed, and long before the end of the service he was sure he could never mistake another man for him.

That afternoon Agniello dropped in, to ask Gabriele if he felt inclined to go and fish on the Secca to-morrow. No, on the whole, he thought not ; he wished to do a little fish-spearing after dark, and that, with the early morning work, would be enough. "Will you let me take Giuseppe with me, then ? Michele can manage the smaller boat for you, and Gaetano can go with me."

Gabriele of course assented ; but he added, after a pause, in a dubious tone, "Why do you want to take Gaetano ?"

"Oh, it's a long pull, and we shall need a third hand, and now that he's going to marry Grazia—what, you didn't know that ? Why, my daughter must have told your wife about it at least two hours ago."

Somehow it wasn't very pleasant news to Gabriele. He was not, and he never had been, in love with Grazia. Of course it was a good thing that she should

be married,—but—well, upon consideration, he did not know anything in particular to Gaetano's disadvantage. Grazia would make a good wife, he was sure, and her husband would never have to go on such an errand as that on which he would shortly be bound. These thoughts flashed through his mind, but hardly formed themselves there, and he replied to the father at once, with what sounded like the most hearty congratulations.

"Well, well," answered the old man, "on the whole I'm satisfied with Gaetano; the girl might have done worse. I had other thoughts once," he continued, after a short pause, "and so, I fancy, had Grazia, but then a little witch—or was it a kitten?—came into the neighbourhood and turned everything upside down."

They all laughed at this remark, and shortly afterwards Agniello took his leave.

On the following morning he started with his companions for Secca, and in the evening Gabriele prepared everything for the fish-spearing expedition. It was nearly eight o'clock when he left his house, and no woman in it, except his mother, had the slightest conception of the real purpose of his night excursion. He had never let fall a hint to her on the subject, but she read his heart by her own, and would have scorned him if she had suspected him of doubt or hesitancy. But she, too, had a part to play, and that was, to show no sign of anxiety or expectation, but simply to go on with her work, and act as if nothing unusual was likely to occur. She only just followed him to the door when he left, and bade him farewell in a slightly fonder tone than usual, and he turned and kissed her. That was all; then she went in and sat down quietly to spin the string that was wanted for the new net.

There was something in his mother's silent sympathy that nerved and soothed Gabriele, and made him feel that, after all, she was nearer and dearer to



him than any one else in the world. He walked slowly and paused to talk with several acquaintances whom he chanced to meet, so that, when he reached the shore, he found Michele waiting for him there among a group of fishermen who were loitering about according to their custom at that hour. After exchanging a few words with these, the two got into the boat and pushed off. In a few minutes more their torch was lighted, and, if you had been standing near the Castel dell' Ovo, you might have watched the bright point gliding softly over the dark waters in the direction of Posilipo.

Gabriele paused every now and then to strike a fish, so that it was quite dark by the time when they reached the little inlet beyond the town, which he had told his neighbours it was his chief purpose to try. They had not been here long before Agniello hailed them. The torch was out, and the boats were alongside each other in a moment. Then a basket full of fish was thrown into the smaller, Gabriele sprang into the larger one, and they again parted. As soon as Michele was alone, he lit another torch, fastened it to the prow, and began to row slowly backwards and forwards, pausing every now and then to spear the dead fishes and scatter them about the bottom of the boat.

Meanwhile, the others were rowing strongly and silently in the direction of the Villa. Twice they made a considerable circuit to avoid coming within a recognisable distance of the small craft whose outlines they could just distinguish in the star-light, and, when they had made half their course, they steered so as to place the bathing-houses, which then stood on that part of the shore, between them and the lights. One of these buildings belonged to Gaetano's uncle, and it was not likely that anybody would be there at that hour, except, perhaps, a watchman of their own class, who could be trusted not to betray



116 STORIES OF NAPLES AND THE CAMORRA

them. As soon as they had reached an easy distance from the land, Gabriele let himself noiselessly into the water, swam to the piles on which the structure rested, and crept up between them, to the sand beyond. The first thing was to reconnoitre; so he crept on his hands and knees into the shadow of the café, which stood with its back to the sea. The band was playing, and the whole of that part of the park was crowded with a brilliant company, some seated on chairs, sipping ice and chatting, or listening to the music, and others moving slowly backwards and forwards, or passing from group to group. Yes, there was the Colonel, just where he had been told to expect him. He was standing behind his wife's chair, talking to a gentleman, while another was conversing with the lady. But how to get at him? He was close to the wall, but that, though low on the side of the Villa, rose too high above the shore to allow Gabriele to strike surely from behind it. There was a little gap in it, about six paces on this side of the Colonel, which it would be easy enough to climb; he must try that. It was fortunate that it was somewhat screened by the shadow of a holm-oak, and that no one was standing inside the row of trees between it and the Colonel. Having made these observations, the fisherman stole quietly along the lower side of the wall, keeping as close to it as he could, until he reached the gap. There he paused for a moment to unclasp his knife, and then clambered up, and stood in the shadow of the tree. The Colonel was bending down over his wife now and arranging her shawls, so that his left shoulder was exposed. Gabriele rushed forwards, thrust his knife into it with the utmost force, withdrew it, sprang the wall, scudded over the sand and plunged into the sea. In another minute he was in the boat, and the whole company were rowing in the direction of Posilipo. Midway Gabriele unclashed his knife and



let it drop into the sea. "You might have given it me," said Gaetano, "it has done good work, and would have brought luck."

"Nay, nay," rejoined Giuseppe, "now that it has once tasted blood, it would always have been hankering after it."

No other word was spoken until they reached Michele, who had rowed some distance out of the inlet to meet them. Then Gabriele rose, and, grasping the hands of his companions one after the other, he said in a low, earnest voice: "Thank you, I will do as much for you and yours, if ever I have a chance; so help me God in my worst need."

"Nay, nay, my boy," said Agniello, "you must not leave us so, I must have a look at you first," and, taking the torch, he examined every part of his dress. There was not a drop of blood upon it. "That will do," he continued, "now be off home, we will follow you in half an hour."

When they were close to Mergellina, Michele rested on his oars. "Give me your hand, too," he said, "you know I have done my part, as well as the others."

"That you have," replied Gabriele, as he warmly pressed the proffered hand, "and I will never forget it."

When he entered the house all the inmates were in bed; but Lucia called him by his name, in a hushed voice, from the lower room. He entered the chamber, and stood beside her bed. "Is it done?" she asked.

"It is done, mother. Thank God, thank God."

When the Colonel was struck, he fell forward on his wife's chair, and died without uttering a moan. A crowd at once collected; but it was at first supposed to be only a fainting fit, and several minutes passed in the confusion before the wound



118 STORIES OF NAPLES AND THE CAMORRA

was discovered and it was known that he had been murdered. All Naples talked of the audacity of the assassin, who had dared to seek his victim in such a place ; but, if any one of those who were present on the occasion remembered to have seen a dark figure glide behind the trees and vanish over the wall, he took care to say nothing at all about it. He doubtless thought it was no business of his, and that there was no reason why he should bring down *vendetta* upon his own head, by too careless a use of his tongue.

Even if suspicion had fallen upon Gabriele, matters had been so arranged that there seemed to be every chance of an acquittal. It could be proved that he had started on his fish-spearing expedition after eight o'clock, that he had gone in the direction of Posilipo, and returned, not long after the usual hour, with an uncommonly large quantity of fish. Michele would not have hesitated to give the most distinct testimony in his favour, and it would be strange if no one on the shore had noticed the torch, which had been kept burning all the evening in the inlet and its vicinity. It was not likely that anything would be heard about Don Antonio's inquiries, but, even if Agniello were questioned about them, he could reply that Donna Agata was so distressed by the loss of her daughter that he had tried to find out something about her, but, on learning how matters stood, he had thought it kindest to keep the information to himself.

All these precautions, however, proved to be unnecessary. The Colonel had kept his connection with Giulia a profound secret, even from his most intimate friends, and so no one thought of attributing his death to her relations. The mystery, therefore, remained unsolved. It was an act of revenge, of course, and people generally agreed in attributing it to some soldiers whom the Colonel was said to have treated with great severity about five years before ; but, as there was no proof whatever of this, the police



GABRIELE

119

were entirely at fault. In Mergellina everybody knew that Antonetta's sister had gone wrong. Her own mother was never weary of telling the story and showing the letter; but those who knew that the Colonel had been her lover took care to keep the secret, and thus nearly a year had passed before it began to be whispered among the fishermen that it was Gabriele who had consummated the most daring act of *vendetta* within the memory of any Neapolitan.

V

GIULIA

GIULIA was disappointed that her lover did not visit her on the Tuesday afternoon, but his absence caused her no anxiety, as she knew that a number of circumstances might have happened to detain him. On Wednesday she became more impatient, but it was not till Thursday evening that she began to fancy that something very extraordinary must have happened. Had he been unexpectedly called away from the town for a week or two? No, in that case he would at least have written to her. Was he ill? Was his wife dying? Her heart beat wildly at the thought; for, if it were so, all that she had ever longed for would suddenly be placed within her reach, and she, who but a short time ago had almost sunk to the level of the Lazzaroni, would be numbered among the great ladies of Naples. What would her mother, what would Antonetta, say then? She would be very good and gracious to them, and they, doubtless, would be very proud of her. That was pleasant, and yet she could not help feeling they would be rather in her way in that grand new life of hers. Such thoughts as these kept her awake nearly all the night, and in the morning she felt she must have some



120 STORIES OF NAPLES AND THE CAMORRA

certainty, so she sent her servant out to make inquiries.

When the girl returned, and told her the tale with which the whole town had been ringing for the last three days, Giulia seemed to be suddenly deprived of every capacity for thought or feeling. She turned very pale, it is true, but she showed no other sign of grief. She did not cry out, she did not weep, she did not even show any curiosity to learn the particulars of her loss. She sat silently, with her hands folded in her lap, and her eyes fixed on vacancy, or moved mechanically about the house. This stupor lasted for nearly a fortnight, and then, one evening, it suddenly passed away. She had taken out her purse to pay for some small household purchase, and had noticed that there was only a single note left in it, and then, as the servant shut the door, the whole reality of her situation flashed upon her. She was not only never going to be a great lady, or to see her lover again; she was an outcast, far worse than the lowest of the Lazzaroni whom she had despised. Her old place at her aunt's was closed to her; her sister's door would be bolted in her face. There was no refuge for her, no one in the whole world to pity her. As she said this bitterly to herself the tears came, and flowed long and silently. And then there suddenly arose in her mind the memory of a monk's face. It was pale and emaciated, the saddest face, she thought, that she had ever seen. If that man knew all her story, she believed he would pity her, he, and he alone, in all the world. If she could only find him. In another moment she had put the idea out of her head. What could a monk do for her? He doubtless found it hard enough to subsist on the slender pittance allowed him by the government since the suppression of his monastery, and on a chance Mass now and then. No, she must think of some more practicable means of escape.



The allowance made to her by the Colonel had been liberal, but he had given it her only from week to week. She had not been particularly extravagant, but she had seen no reason to be careful in her expenditure. What would any paltry saving she might make matter to her when she was his wife? The furniture in the lodging was not hers; she possessed nothing, in fact, but the few lire still left in her purse, her clothes, and the ornaments he had given her.

What was to be done? She could think of nothing. Clever as she was with her needle, she could not imagine that any one would employ her without a character, her very beauty and the fine dresses of which she had been so proud would be against her. She thought with longing of the safe, monotonous days at her aunt's, from which she had been so glad to escape, and even of her sister's home, which, in the old times, had excited nothing but horror. It was hard to be thus cast out from all human fellowship. She did not blame her relations; she knew that in their place she would have felt and acted as they did; but still it was hard. Always, when her thoughts reached this point in their dreary circle, the tears sprang to her eyes and the memory of the monk's pale face arose as if to comfort her.

Two days passed thus. The money was quite spent now, so she sent the servant to pawn her chain. On her return the girl said she had found a new place, and wished to go to it on the following morning, if her mistress would permit. Giulia told her she might leave at once, if she liked, but she felt that the last tie that bound her to her fellow creatures was broken, the last drop of human sympathy exhausted.

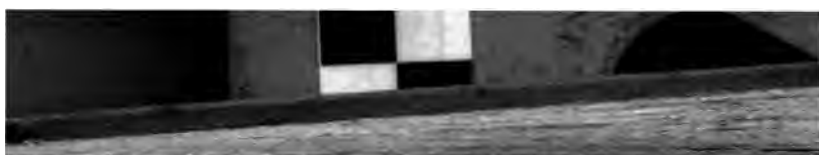
That night her sleep was feverish and broken, and she hardly knew whether it was in dream or waking that she suddenly recollected where it was that she had seen the monk. She had met him twice, about sunset, walking in the Villa with an elderly clergyman,



122 STORIES OF NAPLES AND THE CAMORRA

She would go to-morrow and seek him there. She slept more quietly after having taking this resolution, but in the morning her hesitation returned. She had never before walked the public streets without any protection, and the Villa was close to Mergellina, where the story of her shame had, of course, been the theme of every tongue. But still, it was her last hope, and so despair lent her courage. She dressed as soberly as she could, and walked rapidly through the streets, with her eyes fixed upon the ground, choosing always the least frequented ways. Nothing particular happened until she reached the end of the Viccolo Freddo, where she suddenly encountered a group of fisherwomen, two of whom were known to her. It was too late to go back ; she must pass them, though it seemed like passing through a fire. They made no sign of recognition, but then they spoke no cruel or jeering word. In fact, they felt neither pity nor contempt for her. They were surprised that she was still in Naples, and thought that showed a want of consideration for her mother and sister, and they had curiosity enough to turn and watch her movements from a distance. She entered the park, and sat down on one of the marble seats. Thank God, he was there, walking slowly towards her, in deep conversation with his friend. He was still at a distance, but she knew that it was he.

Brother Francesco was the name by which the monk was known among his brethren, and about his life, too, a story might be told, if there were room for it here ; but, though that story had ended many years before at the gate of a Neapolitan monastery, its scene had not been Naples or Italy, but a northern town, and all I need at present say about him may be summed up in a few words. He was a foreigner, who had been respected in his convent for his learning, but still more for the rigour of his life and the severity of his penances. But, though re-



spected, he had not been loved. His character was entirely wanting in that natural joyousness which enables a Neapolitan to find pleasure in the smallest and simplest things, and his presence acted as a constant restraint on his more light-hearted companions. He took no interest in Brother Lorenzo's roses and melons, and was quite unmoved by the cuckoo clock which Brother Pasquale received as a present from an English visitor ; nay, it was strongly suspected that the admiration he expressed for the Abbot's musical box did not come directly from his heart, but was the result partly of the politeness which he had learnt in the strange, outside world, of which he had seen so much and would tell so little, and partly of the reverence for ecclesiastical superiors on which he was so fond of insisting. In fact, as Brother Giovanni said, he was a man whose company would be agreeable by one's death-bed, but was hardly exhilarating on any less sombre occasion.

When the monastery was secularised, however, the brethren came to regard him in a somewhat different light. From that moment a distant relation had allowed Brother Francesco a monthly pension, which would have been quite sufficient to support him in ease and comfort if he had applied it to his own use. Instead of doing this, however, he divided it among those who seemed to him the most needy of his fellow sufferers. When thus employed, the sum went but a little way, and he trembled to think of the temptations to which men who had been carefully secluded all their lives were suddenly exposed, of the offences that must come, and the scandals to the Church that they must cause. There was, however, nothing more that he could do, but watch and pray, and carefully guard his own life not only from evil, but from the slightest appearance of it.

Everybody wondered how it was that Brother Francesco and Don Diodato had become so intimate

with each other. It certainly was not a similarity of disposition which brought them together, for Don Diodato was a parish priest of no great learning, with an inclination to indulge himself in harmless pleasures, and to judge tolerantly of others. He was zealous in performing the duties of his office, it is true, but he was more desirous of reconciling the quarrels of his parishioners and of smoothing over their family differences than of arousing their religious emotions or inflicting severe penances upon them. His presence never checked the mirth of any company, and he never even pretended to be indifferent to the quality of the food and wine that were placed before him. He would, of course, have acknowledged theoretically that this world is full of sin, sorrow and suffering ; but, for all that, he found it a comfortable place to live in, and wished to make it as pleasant as he could to others. He would have been the first to confess that this was probably because he himself was no better than he ought to be ; yet, to tell the truth, he felt as little inclined to grumble over his own nature as over his surroundings. He knew nothing of the intellectual difficulties, the spiritual conflicts, the fervencies of devotion, and the refinements of penance, in which his friend's life was passed, and yet he had secured a very high place in his affections, for Brother Francesco had a great confidence in his judgment, and fully recognised his unobtrusive goodwill and quiet helpfulness to all, while Don Diodato entertained a very sincere admiration of the higher mental power and more exalted piety of the monk, though he could not refrain from occasionally passing a good-humoured jest on the pedantry of his asceticism.

When the two passed, Giulia had not the courage to address them ; but she rose and followed, with a beating heart. She wished Brother Francesco had been alone, that he would part from his friend, that



she could attract his attention ; but he took no notice whatever of her. When he reached the end of the Villa, he seemed inclined to extend his walk still further, in the direction of Mergellina ; she could not go after him there, and she dared not lose sight of him, so she sprang forward, and took hold of his arm.

"I want to speak to you, father."

Don Diodato walked to a little distance, and then paused. Giulia was unable to speak for a time, and Brother Francesco was painfully conscious that the fact of a beautiful girl standing there, with her hand on his arm, and looking so eagerly into his face, might give rise to strange remarks.

"What have you to say to me?"

Giulia commenced her story without any further introduction ; but Brother Francesco interrupted her—

"This is not a proper place for confession, my daughter, nor am I the man you should confess to. You had far better go to your parish priest."

"It is not your absolution, but your advice, I want."

"You had better ask another adviser. What counsel can I give, who know nothing of the life of the city, and all whose later years have been passed in solitude?"

"There is no one in the whole world but you who will pity me. Oh, father, for Christ's sake, hear me!" and she lifted her clasped hands as if in prayer."

That was an appeal which Brother Francesco dared not reject. He beckoned to Don Diodato, who immediately joined them, and said, "I shall be detained here some little time ; we will meet, as usual, to-morrow." There was a sly twinkle in the priest's eye as he wished them a good afternoon, which added to the monk's discomposure. "Now speak on," he said coldly, and the two turned and walked side by side down the path.



126 STORIES OF NAPLES AND THE CAMORRA

There was something in the girl's story which touched Brother Francesco ; yet when she had finished he asked, almost suspiciously, "Who sent you to me ?"

"Nobody. I remembered your face, and thought you would pity me if you knew about me, because you too are so unhappy."

The monk winced as if a secret wound had been carelessly touched, but he replied very gently—

"I do pity you."

"And what am I to do ?"

"I think you had best go and ask your mother's forgiveness."

"She would not take me in though I lay starving on the threshold."

"I do not see what I can do to help you." He had been thinking the matter over, but obviously his old brethren had a better claim on him than this stranger, however sad her case might be. And yet—what if the "nobody" who had sent her to him should be God—how then ?

"Shall I go and drown myself in the harbour ?"

"Hush, my child, you must not speak lightly of so terrible a thing as death."

"I am not speaking lightly, father. I will do it, if you tell me to. I will do whatever you bid me."

There was a long silence, and then she added, with an effort, "Or shall I go upon the streets ?"

"God forbid !"

"Those are the only two things open to me."

They had been walking on the broad path beneath the holm oak, but now he turned into one of the side ways, and slipped a purse into her hand.

"There is enough there, my daughter, if carefully used, to keep you without sin for the next day or two. Meet me here again at the same hour on Wednesday evening, and I will see if anything can be done for you."



All through the interview Brother Francesco had been uneasily conscious that the strange company he was in had been exciting attention, and probably occasioning remarks that were far from charitable ; but it seemed to him less likely to create scandal if he appointed their second meeting in the same public place, than if he chose a more secluded spot.

On her way home Giulia entered an open church. It was probably the first time in her life that she had really prayed.

Next morning the monk visited Gabriele, and all the little family were assembled ; but he found them quite obdurate. When he insisted on the duty of sinful men forgiving each other, the fisherman replied :—

“ I am not angry with the girl. I wish her no ill, but each of us has to make his own life, and ‘ once a priest, always a priest,’ is true of other things as well. She has chosen her course of life, and must go on with it now. I had rather she left Naples, and shouldn’t mind giving her money to do that with, but I will have nothing else to do with her, and,” he added, turning to the women, “ if any one of you exchanges so much as a single word with her, and I hear of it, you leave the house that very night, and never enter my door again—not if it were you, Antonetta—not even if it were you, mother.”

The person for whom this warning was intended was of course the one who was not mentioned by name, but Gabriele did Donna Agata wrong, for she entirely agreed with all that her son-in-law had said, and Antonetta was the only woman there who was weak enough to feel any pity for her sister.

Brother Francesco was deeply discouraged and out of spirits. It was the first time for many years that he had attempted to exert any influence over his fellow-men, and he had failed utterly. But he felt that a charge was laid upon him that he must fulfil.



128 STORIES OF NAPLES AND THE CAMORRA

When he told the story to Don Diodato, however, the latter spoke encouragingly enough. "I could have told you beforehand," he said, "that your visit to Mergellina would be vain. It would be a bold fisherman who would venture to receive such a girl into his house, for the whole opinion of his class would be against him ; and I am not at all sure, by the way, that that class-opinion is not right. Besides, relatives are always the most unforgiving in such matters, because they feel they have suffered a personal wrong. But in other respects it is not one of those cases for which it is difficult to find assistance, even if we had to beg about for it. These Magdalenes are fashionable just now. But I do not think that will be necessary. The Colonel's wife died on Friday—the effect, the doctors say, of the shock—and I have no doubt that, if the matter is properly brought before his brother, he will think it his duty to provide for the girl. I know him, and I will do that, if you like."

Brother Francesco was silent for a time, and then he said, "I am not sure it would be well that her paths should be laid in too pleasant places. Her heart has been full of pride, vanity and worldliness, and even now, I fear, it is of the misery rather than of the sin that she repents. God forgive me if I judge harshly of the poor creature. But, if she is placed in a position of comparative ease, is there not a fear that her penitence may pass away, and that her last state may be worse than that from which she is rescued? The second sin, you know, is so much easier than the first."

"Well, that is one of your strange, northern fancies, which a simple Neapolitan, who has been born and bred a Catholic, will always find it impossible to understand ; but she is your penitent, not mine ; what do you wish done for her?"

"If it were possible, I would place her in a position



where she should be strictly watched, and have no chance of attracting men's eyes, or pleasing her own, by her fine dresses. It should be at least a little less comfortable than the one she left of her own free choice for a life of sin and luxury. She should be able to earn her bread in it, but only by means of hard work, and constant self-denial."

The elder priest walked once or twice in silence up and down the room, and when he spoke it was in a very low and earnest voice. "My friend, you are about to do what I most dread doing, that is, to make the life of another harder and less pleasant, as she herself would esteem pleasure, than it might otherwise be. I do not say you are wrong; but I myself, dare not play the part of Providence in that way."

There were tears in Brother Francesco's eyes as he replied: "Do you think it is easy for me to inflict pain—most of all, on the one human being who, for years, has clung to me for help? But what can I do—I, who know that in the Last Day God will require this woman's soul at my hands?"

There was a long pause in the conversation; in fact, they had started on their afternoon walk before it was resumed. Then Don Diodato said—"I think I know of something that would meet your views with respect to the girl you are interested in. A small reformatory has lately been started on almost the principles you advocate. Don Giacomo subscribed largely to it, and will consequently have considerable influence in determining who shall be admitted. I am to dine with him this evening; if you will come with me, we will see what can be done for the girl."

"Cannot you manage that alone?" asked the monk, who shrank from all contact with his fellow men.

"No, it is a matter in which I do not wish to

interfere ; but I will introduce the subject, if you will come with me, and then you can say what you like about it."

After some hesitation, Brother Francesco gave his consent.

"You had better only state the case in a general way, and not mention the Colonel. He was not liked by the set to whom Don Giacomo belongs."

Brother Francesco assented.

"And then—one good turn, you know, deserves another ; you want Don Giacomo's help, and you ought to be ready to do something to please him."

"What then ?"

"Eat as hearty a dinner as you can, and praise the wine. You may do that with a good conscience ; it would not be easy to find better in Naples."

"Well, I will see what I can do," said the monk with a smile.

The dinner passed off far better than Don Diodato had expected. Don Giacomo was delighted to have a man of whom he had heard so much for his guest, and Brother Francesco displayed tact and conversational powers for which his friend had not given him credit. As soon as the subject was introduced, the host promised to procure an order of admission to the reformatory for Giulia, and to send it to Brother Francesco on the following day.

"But if you take any interest in the girl," he added, "I would not send her there."

"Why not ?"

"Why, the work is hard, and the living harder still. I only subscribed because they teased me to do it. I think they might make the road to heaven a little less steep and rugged. They say it's better than sheer starvation ; but, for my own part, I'm not sure that I should not choose the shorter cut."

Three days afterwards Giulia was admitted to the private reformatory, in which she passed several years.



The life was one of hard toil, abstinence, and complete deprivation of all that had made up the joy of her life, and it is hardly likely that she would have persevered in it, had not Brother Francesco, in consequence of a series of events that do not concern us here, been appointed chaplain of the Institution a few months after her admission to it. But he soon gained an almost unlimited power over her. From the first she had regarded him with awe and gratitude, as one who had been divinely appointed to save her from a fate worse than death, and these feelings were only increased by a closer intercourse. The austerity of the monk, his settled gloom, nay, even the asperities of his character, impressed her imagination, and she invented numberless romances to explain them, in all of which he played a high though a mournful part. He was different from every man she had ever met or heard of, not only in his actions and manners, but in all his thoughts and feelings. She instinctively felt that he was endeavouring to live in obedience to a self-chosen law, which she could only dimly understand. Her own moral code had been little more than a system of etiquette. To escape the censure and, if possible, to win the admiration of others, had been the chief motive of all she said and did. Even to the Colonel she had been attracted rather by vanity and gratified ambition than by love. And now the worst evil she could imagine, public shame, had come upon her; the world she had adored had cast her out. There was no possibility of her regaining her place in it, her life had become a blank, all she had cherished and longed for was entirely lost, and the fact that she could not deny the justice of the sentence that had been passed on her did not render it less bitter. In this wreck of all her old purposes and rules of action she could not but be drawn to a man who spoke of another moral standard, and appealed to a different

tribunal. If his own life had been less ascetic, she might not have believed what he said ; if he had not been so strict to mark her smallest faults, his hold upon her could never have grown so firm as it soon became. As it was, he seemed to her a living embodiment of the higher law which, week by week she was more consciously and resolutely accepting as her own, an external conscience whose biddings she never ventured to question, however difficult she might find it to obey.

There were several minor circumstances, too, which contributed both to strengthen and to soften her reverence for her spiritual guide. She at first shrank, with a natural repugnance, from the society of the other inmates of the reformatory ; and the Sisters to whom the charge of it had been committed, though pious, kind and conscientious, were not ladies. Brother Francesco, on the other hand, had evidently once belonged to a class superior to her own, and we know how sensitive Giulia had always been to the charm of rank. Besides this, the monk was the only person of unstained reputation who never seemed to feel any contempt for her on account of her past. The very Sisters could not help showing, at times, that they regarded their charges as outcasts. He alone never did so. It was strange, Giulia thought, that the man to whom sin seemed more dreadful than to any one else should also be the only one to feel nothing but sympathy and compassion for the sinner.

Nor was it only in Giulia's life that the meeting in the Villa formed an epoch. Few monks had felt the suppression of their monasteries as bitterly as Brother Francesco. Most of his companions looked forward to their return to the world with a vague dread which was not entirely unmixed with curiosity. They had withdrawn from secular life early, their knowledge of it was both vague and limited. He



had taken an eager and active part in it, and then abandoned it in horror and self-despair. His life, even in seclusion, had not been a happy one ; the old longings and temptations followed him into his retirement, and doubts continued to arise, even in the loneliness of his cell. These he combated by protracted exercises of devotion, by rigorous fasting, and by penances that might have seemed better suited to the thirteenth than the nineteenth century. His thoughts were constantly centred upon his own sins, and he who, to those who lived in daily intercourse with him, appeared to be almost a saint, though rather an unamiable one, could find nothing but depravity in his own heart, and was consumed by remorse and self-loathing. Yet the convent walls restrained him from the commission of actual sin ; he had often told himself, in the bitterness of his spirit, that it was they alone that did so. The strict rule of the order lent him an external support, to which he clung all the more passionately from a sense of his weakness ; the monotonous daily routine of the hours soothed him. When all these safeguards were removed, and he was cast back again into the world from which he had fled, he redoubled his fasts and penances. There was no kindly Abbot now to interpose his authority, and the confessor he had chosen was too overawed by his sanctity to dare to interfere. Thus it is not strange that, about the time when Giulia first addressed him, the monk's health was beginning to give way under the constant physical and emotional strain to which it was exposed.

He had shrunk from the society of all but a few clergymen, not only with the shyness of a recluse, but with a fear of being led into temptation. His self-distrust was too deep for him to imagine that he could be a help to any one, and it was with trembling he undertook the charge the girl thrust upon him, which he dared not decline. And yet the day on

which he did so was, in fact, the commencement of his own deliverance. The fact that he had been the means of saving another soul from destruction inspired him with new faith and confidence, and, in replying to her spiritual difficulties, he not unfrequently found an answer to his own. And, if in this one case the grace had been granted him to take part in the active service of the Redeemer, might not that be his true calling, a divine behest, from which he was shrinking in cowardly dread? He began to open his eyes, doubtfully and timorously at first, to the world around him; but, as soon as he recognised its sin and misery, self was quite forgotten, and he was conscious only of a passionate impulse to serve the meanest of those who had abandoned their God, and whom the world had cast out. To the end he not only acknowledged, but insisted on, the superiority of the contemplative life; but he was content to take the lower place, and it was in works of mercy that he himself found peace. He is dead now, but his memory still lives in the veneration of hundreds to whom he ministered, and by these he is already regarded as a saint.

"I cannot pray for him," an old woman said to me shortly after his death, "but I often feel that he is praying for me."

VI

SALVATORE'S PENANCE

IT was many years before the events that have now been related, when Gabriele was only a boy, that he first made the acquaintance of Salvatore, or Torillo, as he was then called. It was Christmas Eve and throngs of people of all classes, in their Sunday finery, were passing from church to church to admire the holy cradles, and criticise their respective merits.



The exhibition at San Giuseppe's was especially fine that year. On the Chiaia and in Mergellina everybody was talking about it, and of course Gabriele went to see it with the rest. There were the Madonna and St. Joseph, and the Babe, and the Wise Men of the East, and the Shepherds, all life-size, and in dresses that made a far finer show than even those of their worshippers. The boy was delighted with the sight, and stayed as long before it as the pressure of the crowd would permit. When he was obliged to pass on, a little child put its hand in his, and said, "Please take me home." Gabriele led it out of the church. His new acquaintance might be four years old; he said his name was Torillo, and that he lived at Santa Lucia. There is no great love lost between the fishermen of Mergellina and those of Santa Lucia, but it was impossible to leave the child alone in the street, so Gabriele began to lead it in the direction of its house. They had not gone far, however, when Torillo again said, "I am tired, please carry me;" which the elder boy good-naturedly proceeded to do. Now that he was quite comfortable, the little vagrant was ready enough to give an account of himself. As his mother had a bad foot, and his father was busy, Za' Maria had taken him and several other children to see the *Bambini*. They were all very pretty, but to go to the last church was like going to heaven. He wanted to stay longer, so he hid himself behind the black man when the others went away. He was not afraid to be alone, for he knew the Madonna would take care of him, but after a while he felt hungry, so he asked her to send some one to take him home, and she nodded. Then he asked her to nod again when the right person came, and when Gabriele had come she had done so. He was quite sure the Madonna had nodded, and he was hungry still. So Gabriele bought a handful or two of roasted chestnuts, and shared them with him. He



did not quite believe the story, and yet, who could tell how much of it might be true? When he restored the child to its mother, she thanked him, but neither scolded it nor showed any signs that its long absence had caused her any anxiety.

"Oh, I'm never afraid for Torillo," she said in answer to a question, "the angels always take care of him; he is always talking to them. His heart is purer than mine, so I let him do just as he likes."

The acquaintance which had thus been made continued. Every week or two, when Gabriele happened to be passing Santa Lucia, and had no very important business on hand, he would look in to see what the child was doing, and on such occasions, Torillo, who had taken a fancy to him, would climb upon his knee, and tell him all kinds of odd stories about the saints and the *monacelli*, the Madonna, and the fearful dragons that guard the treasures which are buried at various points on the coast. Gabriele always felt inclined to laugh at these tales when they were first told; but afterwards he would ponder them over and wonder whether they might not be true. At any rate they amused him, as did the other strange sayings and ways of the child, so that a kind of friendship grew up between them, which in after years became of considerable service to the younger boy, who had neither energy nor practical talent of any kind. He was too quiet and good-natured, it is true, to excite the malice of his companions; indeed, his facility in telling stories and his readiness always to play a second part and to do little services rendered him rather a favourite in the neighbourhood of his home: but his own father felt a strong contempt for him, because, as he phrased it, he was always catching hold of the knife by the blade and the eel by the tail. When the mother endeavoured to soften his reproaches by urging that Torillo had other, and perhaps higher, gifts, her



husband silenced her by saying that, if the Madonna intended him for a priest, it was a pity she had forgotten to provide the means for his education. And, on experiment, the mother was obliged to confess to herself that her son seemed to have no call for the clerical profession ; for when she spent a part of her small savings in hiring a teacher for him, he proved at least as dull at his book as at other matters.

In general Torillo, who was by this time nearly fourteen years old, bore the scoffs of others very meekly. His dreams seemed to serve as a padding to keep off the shafts of wit and deaden the blows of anger. But he had a great affection for his father, and his constant reproaches inflicted the deepest pain upon him. He never doubted that they were just, or that he himself deserved all the scoldings he had to bear ; but he soon found that all his efforts to do better ended in failure, and sank into silent hopelessness. It was then that his friend came to his assistance.

Gabriele, who had long noticed the boy's growing melancholy, and after some difficulty induced him to speak openly on the subject, proposed to take him into his own boat, and teach him what he could. The fisherman at once consented, as he had a great respect for the youth's skill and character, and was entirely wearied out by the mistakes and shiftlessness of his son ; indeed matters had gone so far that the mother complained that the mere sight of the boy threw him into a passion. Torillo got on rather better in his new position than in his old one, as the constant terror in which he had lived was removed, but Gabriele was soon obliged to confess that there was little hope of making a good fisherman of him. Still, he treated him with patience and forbearance, which were repaid by the most devoted attachment. The lad followed his master about like a dog, listened for his lightest word, and was anxious to anticipate all his wishes.

Things stood thus, when Torillo's mother died, and his father hastened to carry out a project which he had long contemplated. If anything would wake the boy up, it would be a sea voyage, and he should start on one as soon as possible.

Gabriele, on the whole, approved of the plan, and Torillo, who was now in his eighteenth year, seized upon it with an eagerness he rarely displayed. Was it not a great opportunity of seeing new wonders and hearing new stories?

Arrangements were soon made, and the lad was enrolled in the crew of a sailing vessel bound for Tunis. On bidding him farewell, his father said, "Now that you will have to shift for yourself among strangers, act like a man from the first." Torillo had quite made up his mind to do so. Indeed, for the last week or so he had been giving himself a good deal of trouble in learning to swear, though in doing so he showed a marked preference for the mildest of current expressions, as he wished to give as little offence to his old friends the saints and angels as possible. He was rather proud of his progress, but a little uneasy as well, as an apprehension of bad luck of some kind or other was the form which his scruples of conscience usually took.

His efforts to act as a man did not impose on his new companions, who led him rather a hard life till every pretension was knocked out of him, and he contentedly took his natural place as the most awkward, the laziest, and in every way the least serviceable member of the ship's company. Afterwards he got on comfortably enough, for in the long, idle days of the outward voyage, the men found it pleasant to have a butt on whose simplicity they could constantly practice, and a listener who unquestioningly accepted the wildest of their yarns. He had begun to feel a great admiration for his associates, which every one would have shared who



agreed with him in believing their tales. One had combated single-handed against whole tribes of savages ; a second had passed one part of his life on a drifting iceberg with a polar bear for his only companion and another amid all the refinements of luxury at the court of an Eastern princess, where polygamy was the custom of the country ; while a third reproduced such fragments of the *Arabian Nights* as he could remember, as personal reminiscences, or illustrations of the manners of foreign lands. To all these things Torillo listened with breathless interest ; but he was still more anxious to gather useful knowledge as to the best way of frustrating the designs of evil spirits, or deprecating the wrath of the celestial powers. He dared not ask any direct questions on the subject, for, when he did so once, the boatswain had told him he need not trouble his head about such matters, for no devil would be stupid enough to think he could gain any credit by outwitting *him*, and the remark had been remembered as a joke against him ever since. But, nevertheless, he kept his ears open, and picked up and laid to heart a quantity of important, though somewhat contradictory, information on the subject. One thing at least was clear—that in moments of extreme danger no vow was so likely to attract the Madonna's attention as a promise to marry an outcast woman on one's return home. This was an entirely new vow to Torillo, no one on board had ever known it to fail, and it did not occur to the youth that they had no drowned man in their company.

The weather during the whole of the outward voyage was fine, and the winds were light, though not very favourable. It was the kind of passage which pleases an idle landsman better than a captain, who prefers an early arrival to a smooth sea. On her return, however, the ship encountered a heavy sea. It was a fearful sight to the fisher-lad, who, with all his

companions, had been used to make for the land on the first sign of foul weather, and the sailors did their best to encourage his fears. One hastily advised him to put on the belt that contained his money, as it was just possible he might be picked up in a day or two, if he could manage to cling to a plank when the ship went down. Another remarked to a friend, as they were passing, that he pitied those who could swim, as that would only lengthen their death-agony. A third told him not to be down-hearted, but to look sharply about him, as there was still a chance of their weathering the storm; and a fourth wondered where they would all be that time to-morrow night. As the wind was strong enough to give full work to the sailors, such hints came at rare intervals, and made their full impression on Torillo's mind. All his ambitious dreams of combating savage tribes and wooing Eastern princesses suddenly vanished, and he firmly resolved that, if he ever reached Naples in safety, he would never again leave it in search of perilous adventures. He still possessed self-command enough to obey such orders as were given him, but his imagination was full of terrors. He looked up to the black, starless sky, and down to the dark surging water, and saw himself fighting there with the waves in the lonely night. He knew how it would all be; the sudden shock, the cold plunge, the desperate effort, the failing strength, the choking power of the sea, the last struggle—and then? He thought of all his sins, and bitterly repented the vain ambition which had induced him to swear. It looked quite different now to what it had done at the time. The saints had always been so good to him, they had watched over him from his earliest childhood, and he had repaid them by making a mockery of their names. It was true he had never really meant it; he had always loved them in his heart. But this, perhaps, only made matters worse. It was no wonder they had deserted him now. He



deserved every evil that could come upon him. But was there no escape from it, after all? He kept murmuring over the *Ave* and the *Paternoster* and such fragments of the Litany of the Saints as he could remember. He would not put on his belt—let the sea take that if it would. But was there nothing else he could do? The great vow he had heard of—what if he made that? All his old friends and companions would make a mock of him, of course: but had not he, too, made a mock of the Saints? If he could only regain their favour what did it matter what human beings might say? Just then the saints seemed very dear, and the Neapolitans a long way off—he made the vow—the dark clouds parted, and a star appeared. It was only for a moment, but Torillo felt that his prayer was heard.

Towards morning the wind abated, and by sunrise it was blowing gently, though the sea was still rough. The sailors were disappointed that their jest had missed fire, for Torillo had shown no outward sign of fear, and he now made no boast of his courage. "It wasn't much of a breeze for one of us, to be sure, but it was enough to make a shore-crab like him cast his shell, or at least nip his tail between his legs." "He didn't even put on his belt, though I told him to." "The lad is not half such a simpleton as he seems; I fancy he pretends to be stupid for the joke's sake, and to get off work." "Perhaps he's been laughing at us all along, just as much as we have at him." "If I thought that, I wouldn't leave him much of a face to laugh with."

Such remarks were made behind the youth's back, but he soon became conscious that he was treated with a degree of respect that was very unusual, and by no means unpleasant, and began to fancy his mess-mates were quite right in thinking he was rather a fine fellow, who had behaved with great courage during the night. He said nothing about his vow,

though he had little doubt that it had saved the whole ship's crew. They would only laugh at it, and then, to tell the truth, it was not a pleasant subject to think about. How everybody, Gabriele and his father included, would laugh at him ! It was all very well for a sailor, who was always at sea, to take such a wife, but for a fisherman, who had to live almost always at home and with his neighbours, it was a far harder thing. The more he pondered it over, the more disagreeable it seemed.

The weather was fine, they were within sight of the coast, and hoped to reach Naples in thirty-six hours' time. Torillo was sitting on the deck mending his jacket when it suddenly occurred to him that he might make a trip to Leghorn or Genoa, and choose his wife there. That would be a means of fulfilling his vow and yet escaping its most disagreeable consequences, as no one would know who his wife was or what her earlier history had been. A great burden was lifted from his heart ; that evening he was very merry and he went to sleep better satisfied with himself and the world than he had been since the night of the storm.

Shortly after midnight, however, he was awakened by a shock and a crash. He rushed upon deck, and found captain and crew in the deepest dismay. A steamer had run into the ship and passed on. The exact amount of the damage had not yet been ascertained, but it was clear that the vessel was rapidly filling, and a south wind, which threatened to become a storm, was rising. What happened during the next ten minutes it is impossible to say, as Salvatore's own account of the matter was too incoherent and too full of marvels to merit an implicit belief. It is certain, however, that in that short interval he bitterly repented of his design to escape from the consequences of his vow, and solemnly repeated it, with the addition that his wife should be chosen in his own city. The



captain meanwhile had convinced himself that it was impossible to save the ship, and had given orders to lower the boats. As this was being done, the steamer, which had put about as soon as possible, hove in sight, and took the whole of the crew on board. They were landed safely at Naples on the forenoon of the following day.

Torillo, or Salvatore as we must henceforth call him, found that considerable changes had taken place in his absence. His father had broken his right arm and his leg a few days after his departure, and an illness had followed which had left the sturdy fisherman infirm and old.

Under these circumstances Gabriele strongly advised that he should remove to Mergellina and sell his boat and nets. With the money thus obtained a lighter and more elegant boat might be bought, in which Salvatore might try his luck as a boatman, and, when there were few foreigners in the town, he could always find work in one fishing craft or another.

The old man gave his consent to the plan, though somewhat unwillingly. He knew it was no use to hope that his son would ever make a fisherman, but he didn't like to think of being entirely laid on the shelf. If the old trade could have been carried on, he might still have been of some use in helping to mend and dry the nets. Gabriele said he was just looking out for somebody to help Giuseppe in these matters, and that somewhat comforted him. As soon as the scheme was explained to him, Salvatore agreed to it. He liked to have his life arranged for him and to be told what to do.

The next few weeks were busily occupied in making the changes requisite for their new way of life, and yet his mind was constantly haunted by the memory of his vow. At times it seemed impossible to fulfil it. How could he bring such a wife as that into his father's house, and ask Lucia and Antonetta and

Grazia and all the other neighbours to associate with her? And yet, how was he to escape the vengeance of the saints, who were so powerful even in this world, and who must decide his fate in the next? He could not make up his mind about it, and for a long time he dared not mention the matter to any one, but grew gloomier from day to day.

Gabriele noticed this sadness, but fancied it arose from the perception that his position in the world would be lowered by the steps they were taking; so he did everything he could to encourage him. At last, one day, he said quite suddenly :—

“You must be thinking of marrying soon. A house is always more comfortable for having a woman in it, and, if the old man’s ill, he’ll want some one to look after him when you are out of the way.”

Salvatore had been touched by his friend’s kindness, and had often thought of explaining to him the whole cause of his misery, but something within him had always checked his confidence. Now the words came readily enough, and he told him all.

Gabriele argued at great length against the fulfilment of the vow, and Salvatore listened patiently enough, though he said little that he himself had not already pondered over.

“But what am I to do?” he asked, when his friend had finished.

“You must make some atonement, of course; you had better ask your Father Confessor about that. A number of candles, perhaps even a pilgrimage, may be necessary; I will lend you what money you want for the purpose. Only put the very thought of such a marriage out of your head.”

Salvatore’s mind was relieved, but it was by no means set quite at ease by this conversation. He had not yet resolved to break his word; so he did not consult the priest. Indeed he had absented himself from confession ever since his return, because



he knew he had a duty to perform from which he shrank, and now he still postponed his decision from day to day, and from week to week.

Meanwhile his success in his new calling was greater than either he or his friends had ventured to hope. He became a favourite with the foreigners on account of his courtesy and his quiet manners; those who employed him once generally looked out for him the second time that they wanted a boat, and one party even asked him to make the arrangements for a longer excursion. They proposed to be absent for two, or perhaps three days, and to visit several points of the coast as well as Procida and Ischia. For this a larger craft and more men were required. Gabriele readily lent his boat, and he persuaded Michele and Gaetano to take part in the expedition. It was an understood thing that all real power was to be left in the hands of the latter, though Salvatore retained the nominal command.

The first day passed pleasantly and uneventfully, and in the evening they drew up the boat on the little piece of sandy shore which lies beneath, and somewhat to the north of, the rock on which the town of Ischia is situated. On the following morning, however, when they were setting her afloat again, and Salvatore was standing knee-deep in the water, he suddenly uttered a sharp cry. Gaetano and Michele at once drew him into the boat, but he lay there writhing at the bottom. He had been struck in the foot by the animal which scientific men call *Uranoscopus Scabii*, and English sailors, I believe, the cat-fish, and the pain, which had at first been confined to the wounded leg, soon extended to the upper part of the body.

"Send for the wise man," shouted Gaetano to a group of fishermen who had collected on the shore. "For a priest," insisted Salvatore.

When the wise man arrived, he remarked that it

was a pity the cat-fish had not been caught, as its death would have ensured the patient's life, and, besides this, its liver might have been applied to the wound to ease the pain. As things stood, they must trust entirely to the power of the sun. The boat's head must be kept all day pointing directly towards it, so as exactly to follow its course. He laid Salvatore on a rough couch which Michele had constructed at the back of the boat, with his head looking in the same direction, and proceeded to mutter a number of charms and incantations. When these were done, he bade Michele form the sail into a kind of tent to shield the sufferer from the light and heat, and, taking Gaetano ashore with him, he told him that, if the cure were successful, the pain would follow the strength of the sun, increasing as long as it was rising in the heavens, and diminishing as soon as it began to decline. He also promised to return and repeat the necessary formulas at all the ominous hours. In the meantime the priest had arrived, and Salvatore at once made his confession to him.

While he was thus engaged, the gentlemen who had hired the boat came down with the intention of starting on their day's trip. On being informed how matters stood, they at once sent for a regular practitioner. He examined the wound, and informed them that it was a case in which little or nothing could be done. There was no danger of its having a fatal end, but the poison, he said, must work itself off. It would probably have exhausted its strength in some twelve or fifteen hours, but it would leave the boatman very weak and exhausted, and he would probably suffer for some time to come from pains in his limbs. They therefore resolved to spend that day on the island and either to continue or abandon their excursion on the following one, as circumstances might decide.

Next morning Salvatore was free from pain, but



almost unable to move. Even Michele admitted that all danger was passed, and he consented to continue the expedition with another sailor, whom Gaetano was to choose, but only on condition that they should start later than the market boat, which was to take the sick man back to Naples.

"You know Gabriele trusted him to you and me," he said to Gaetano, who was not at first inclined to insist on the point. So both of his companions saw him comfortably bedded on the market boat, and gave its crew the strictest charges with respect to him, before they proceeded on their way.

These instructions were hardly necessary, for everybody on board felt the deepest pity for the sick man and strove to show it in all possible ways. Yet they happened to be of use, for the crew saw Gabriele at work with his *nasse* off the Capo di Posilipo, and hailed him, because Gaetano had told them he was interested in their passenger, and he at once left his fish-traps and returned to Naples. He was shocked to see how pale and emaciated his friend looked, for the one day of intense pain had made a great change in the ruddy face and the body that already inclined to corpulence. With the help of an acquaintance he almost carried him home, and there, as the father was out, he helped him to undress and get into bed. He then proposed to call Lucia; but Salvatore begged him to stay awhile, as he had something to say.

The Ischian priest had, from the first, strongly insisted on the necessity of his fulfilling his vow to the letter, and it was only on his promising to do so in case of his recovery, without any needless delay, that he had granted him absolution. Early that very morning, before he started, he had come to see him again, and told him where to find a priest in Naples whose advice on the subject he might ask. Salvatore's own mind was fully made up; he would delay

no longer, lest a worse thing should come upon him. Even Gabriele was shaken.

"The saints seem to have a sharper eye on the lad than on the rest of us," he said to the father, with whom he had promised to discuss the matter, "and so I suppose he must be more careful not to vex them."

For his own part, he felt he would rather a thousand times have died than make, or fulfil, such a vow. But then Salvatore was different, and he could not help fancying, at times, that in the dim unknown future life, to which they were all hastening, the defects and weaknesses at which the kindest of his companions could not help laughing might prove to be virtues. He remembered to have heard something in a sermon about the Saviour saying that unless a man became like a little child he could not enter His kingdom, and he felt that Salvatore was more childlike than himself or any of those who made a jest of him. At any rate, it was a friend's business to make the best even of a bad matter, and this, now that an irrevocable decision had been taken, he consequently resolved to do.

It was no use attempting to conceal the matter. Even if the chances of discovery had been smaller than they were, Salvatore was not a man who could keep a secret of such importance silent in his heart for years. It was better to face the difficulty openly and at once. It could not be expected that the fishermen of Mergellina would allow their wives and daughters to associate intimately with such a woman, but there was no reason why the common civilities of life should not be observed towards her, now that the Madonna had so plainly indicated her will that she should be brought into their midst. Salvatore was to be pitied that such a charge was laid upon him, but to reproach either him or his wife with her former life would clearly be to find fault with the



Divine government of the world. Now the Madonna had shown that it was her desire that this fallen woman should be accepted as pure it was their duty to receive her as such.

With such arguments as these Gabriele overcame not only the ill-feeling of the neighbours, but the objections of the father, and, as soon as Salvatore was well enough to walk so far, he went to seek the priest to whom he had been directed. This was none other than Brother Francesco.

The monk received him kindly, and, on hearing the purpose of his visit, he strengthened him in his belief that the vow ought to be fulfilled, but added that it was quite right he should choose his own wife from among the class indicated, and offered, for that purpose, to accompany him to the principal reformatories of the town.

After they had visited two of them Salvatore said :—

“Father, choose for me, I have no wish but to fulfil my vow.”

“Let us go in here first,” said the monk, and he led the way to the house in which Giulia had been living for several years.

As soon as he saw her, Salvatore whispered to his companion : “I could love that woman : I believe the blessed Virgin has sent me to her.”

“It is well,” replied Brother Francesco, and he spoke no more till they had left the house and reached the corner where their ways parted. Then he said : “You have chosen well, my son ; no woman in Naples has shown a truer repentance. Come to me on the day after to-morrow and I will give you her answer.”

When he broke the matter to Giulia, she simply said :

“Do not ask me to decide. I promised you once I would do whatever you told me : I have obeyed you for years ; I will obey you in this too.”

"I believe it is the will of God," said the monk, "and we must all strive to do His will."

On the evening before the marriage, after she had confessed to him, he said: "You enter your new life, my daughter, not as you might once have entered it, and you must therefore be more careful than other wives to avoid every appearance of evil, and to fulfil to the very utmost all the duties of your station. You will have much to do, and much to bear. Try always to do it, and to bear it, for your Saviour's sake."

"Father," she answered, "you first taught me the meaning of sin; pray for me, that I may not fall into temptation."

He had given her his blessing, and she had risen to go, when he added: "It may be well that you should know that it was by your means God showed me the work He intended me to do. We shall not meet hereafter as we have hitherto met. You must take your parish priest for your director, and follow his guidance. Do not appeal to me in little things; but, if ever you have a great occasion, send for me. Whenever you send, I will come to you."

No one in Mergellina had any knowledge of where Giulia was. From the day on which Gabriele had scornfully rejected Brother Francesco's entreaties that she might be forgiven, her own relations had entirely lost sight of her. A few days afterwards, it is true, Antonetta had watched for him as he passed down the Villa in the twilight, and endeavoured to thrust a small purse into his hand.

"Give that to my sister," she had said; "it is all I have been able to save. But do not tell her or any one else that it comes from me; my husband would never forgive me if he knew."

"Your first duty is to obey him," the monk had replied, putting back the proffered gift, "and, as for your sister, she is already cared for."



She was the only member of the family who knew as much as this, and even she found it impossible to imagine what provision could have been made for Giulia.

It was therefore a great surprise to them all when she reappeared as the wife of Salvatore, and to Gabriele, at least, it was an unpleasant one.

"It seems to be the will of the Madonna," he said, "that she should come among us once again, but the most that we can do is to bury the whole past. Do not reproach her with it, but constantly remember that she can no longer be considered either as your daughter or your sister. She is a stranger with a bad name ; treat her as such." And both the women, for a time, obeyed him.

VII

THE END OF IT

THE twelve years that passed after the day when Gabriele carried out his first *vendetta* wrought many changes in his own life and that of his most intimate friends. Agniello and Lucia had both passed away, and Salvatore's father was also dead. Michele, after making several voyages, had returned and married a neighbour's daughter, whom he treated with a good deal of rough, uncertain kindness, and spoke of with unvarying contempt. She made him a good wife, but had no real power over him. It was only his children who found him constantly gentle, and who could make him do whatever they liked.

When Giulia entered her new home, she did so with fear and trembling. She was grateful to the neighbours for not abusing her, but made no effort to become intimate with them, and they, on their side, offered her no opportunity of doing so. She laid no

claim of relationship to her mother or Antonetta, and made no advances towards them, but lived a quite solitary life as far as the world outside her own house was concerned. Indoors, however, she found enough to do, for her father-in-law's health was gradually failing, and he became weaker and more fretful from day to day. She watched over the old man with constant care, and treated him with unvarying kindness, though he never displayed the slightest gratitude or rewarded her thoughtfulness with anything but querulous complaints and the hardest of hard names. Her patient gentleness to the old man had a certain effect on the opinions of the neighbours, particularly on those of Gabriele, who watched the strange marriage as closely as he could from the distance he thought it right to keep. It made a still deeper impression on the mind of her husband, who thankfully acknowledged that the Madonna had given him a better wife than he could have chosen for himself. Giulia, too, who had at first been simply thankful that she was not beaten and ill-used, now began to understand Salvatore's character and to feel a real affection for him.

Shortly after the father's death, an old man who had outlived all his relations was taken ill. Everybody who knew him was touched by the hardness of the case. Presents of food were daily sent him, and every now and then somebody would look in to see if he were in want of anything ; but still, many of his weary hours had to be passed alone. Giulia felt how hard that must be, and proposed to her husband that they should take him into their house, in order that she might be able to watch constantly over him. Salvatore at once consented, and the plan was carried out. The good people of Mergellina were not greatly surprised by this act of charity, but they approved of it.

"It isn't fair, however," Agniello remarked, when



Gabriele told him what had happened, "that the whole burden should fall on the lad ; he isn't as well off as you or I."

So it was agreed among the fishermen that their presents should henceforth be sent to Salvatore's, whose wife was thus brought into a closer intercourse with her female neighbours than before. The old man was nursed back into something like health, but he never left his new quarters, and he was unwearied in praising the kindness of his friends, and in blessing God who had given him a daughter in his old age.

From this time Giulia was frequently sent for in any case of serious illness, for she had a soothing way with the sick, and a knack of teaching others how to nurse them. So, when Agniello took to his bed, she was called in, and she stayed with him to the end ; for he was pleased with her light hand and quiet, noiseless ways, and she saw that there was little hope of his recovery.

About a month afterwards, Donna Agata and Lucia both fell ill of a fever at the same time, and then Salvatore went to Gabriele and told him that Giulia wished to come and help Antonetta, but she did not know if he and his wife would like it ; and Gabriele bade her come, in God's name, and she went. She tended the two women with the utmost care, but she moved about the house as if she had been a hired nurse. Antonetta's heart went out to her, but she durst show her no sign of affection, partly from dread of the words her husband had spoken, and partly because her sister's reserve checked her.

Now Donna Agata was well advanced towards her recovery when Lucia died, and so, on the day of the funeral, Giulia took her bundle and returned to her own house, and neither her mother nor her sister ventured to ask her to stay ; but, when Gabriele found she was gone, he went in search of her and led her back by the hand, and a complete reconciliation followed.

and direction; at least none of the
had shown any preference for him.
second daughter, was nearly eleven;
was a little over eight. The father had
affection for all his children, but the
great joy and pride. Yet most of
thought he treated him harshly. He
plaything of him, or took him to court
with his associates, or allowed him to
as Michele encouraged his children.
latter had become almost the slave of
old daughter, the patient butt of all her
and the obedient servant of her whim.
was only a year old her favourite and
been to knock a piece of wood off the
table to see her father pick it up again.
not become less tyrannical as she advanced.
This new sense of obedience was strange
to the fierce, wayward man, and he was
submissive because he felt there was
humorous in his submission. Vincenzo's
hand, had never for a moment been slack
that it was his part to obey. He was
whenever he did anything wrong, and ri-
ever he was stupid, and he hated being
far more than being beaten. Yet he
father with a passionate affection which



Sorrento, and she wondered if her daughter dreamed such dreams as hers had been, though she knew it would be useless to ask. How well she could remember them ! And how dull and dreary her real life had been, when she compared it with them ! Were they so foolish, after all, or had only her own lot been a sad and dreary one ? She could not think that her companions were as dissatisfied as she was. She was not unhappy. She knew she had no right to complain, and she never did. She had enough to eat and drink, and a good house, and children whom she loved, and a husband—well, I suppose she loved him too—at least it never occurred to her to doubt it. But the habits and interests of the people among whom she lived were not those for which her early youth had prepared her, and, after the fun and novelty of the change had passed away, they had become more irksome to her from year to year. If she could only be a lady, for once, and mix with those who felt as she did, and have a good laugh at the rough manners and strange ways of her husband and his companions, and at all her own joys and troubles ;—in that case she would be able to laugh at herself too, though it might be a little sadly, and that would do her good. She knew it was silly, and yet there was a vague longing in her heart for something quite different from all that surrounded her, she did not know exactly what ; but it had seemed nearer to her during the first year of her marriage—nearest of all, perhaps, in those foolish, girlish days, when the present seemed so easy to bear, because it was not difficult to imagine such a bright future. Sometimes, when she was alone of a night, such feelings became so powerful that she would rush out into the cool air to escape them, and they poisoned half her joy in her children, even when she seemed outwardly content.

Such was the state of things when a foreign painter arrived in Naples. Everybody talked about

him, because he used to come day by day to Mergellina to draw the boats, the fishermen and the children, to the last of whom he would frequently give soldi on condition of their sitting still, and he was rather a favourite on account of his urbanity and his readiness to chat with any one who happened to be about.

One day when Antonetta went down to the shore she found Vincenzo standing, with the utmost seriousness, on a boat, high up upon land, with an oar in his hand, in the attitude of rowing, and she was just going to jest with him on the new game he had invented, when she saw that he was standing as a model for the artist. Her curiosity was excited, and she stole up behind the stranger and looked over his shoulder. On his turning with an inquiring glance, she simply said, "I am his mother," and pointed to the child.

"Oh, then, I want you to let him stop here for another hour or so, and to come again to-morrow and the day after, as I wish to finish this more carefully than any of the other sketches."

Antonetta at once consented, and, after a few words of general conversation, she left him.

On the following day she washed Vincenzo very clean, and dressed him in his Sunday clothes, but to her great surprise he was sent back again, to put on his old, torn things. She could hardly believe it, and went down after him to see if it were true.

"Yes, people who were really beautiful looked best in the simplest clothes." The painter gave just one glance upwards towards her as he spoke, and she answered merrily: "That would be a comfortable doctrine for a pretty girl who cannot spend as much as she would like upon her dress, and a still pleasanter one for her parents."

Then a little more general conversation followed.

It was natural that she should feel interested in



the picture, and she went down two or three times a day to have a look at it. But the painter found it more troublesome work than he expected, for he took a full week to finish it, and by that time Vincenzo discovered that sitting for one's portrait is rather a wearisome distinction, though he was solaced with frequent supplies of sweetmeats and soldi. It was finished at last, however ; but then Antonetta was not allowed to see it.

"If you will come here again, the day after to-morrow, I will show it you," the stranger said, "but I want to touch it up in my own room first. Will you come?"

Antonetta promised to do so.

The next day seemed very long ; she had grown used to chatting with the foreign gentleman, and it brought a change into the monotony of her life. It was not only that by his dress and manners he evidently belonged to a class even higher than that from which she had been exiled by her marriage ; there was something at times in his words and tone that made her almost fancy he had come from the land of her dreams. No one had ever drawn so near to the imaginative side of her nature, or seemed so well able to understand it, as this man, who was so far removed from her in every other respect, and with whom she had exchanged nothing but commonplace or jesting remarks. On the following afternoon she kept her appointment.

"Is it like?" the painter asked, displaying the sketch.

"Very like."

"And this one?" He withdrew the upper leaf, and she saw her own portrait, more roughly drawn, beneath.

"Do I look as sad as that?" she asked.

"Not always, but sometimes. You did the first time I saw you. You were standing by the boat up

there then, and looking out across the sea. That was before I knew you were Vincenzo's mother."

"What does it matter to anybody how I look or feel?" she said bitterly, after a pause.

"It matters a great deal to me."

She was silent again for a second or two, and then she spoke hurriedly: "You must not let my husband, or any one else, see that picture."

"I will not," he replied in a low voice she felt she could trust, and then he added in a bantering tone, holding up Vincenzo's portrait, and hiding hers among the blank leaves, "Should you like to have this?"

"Very much indeed."

"You must buy it then; I am too poor to paint for nothing."

"Oh, yes, everybody can see how poor you foreign gentlemen are, what would it cost then?"

"A kiss."

Such a light flashed into her eyes, and such a colour glowed out on her cheeks, that he was afraid for a moment he had gone too far. Then he just caught the low, tremulous words:—"Not now, not here," and he was alone.

Gabriele had, of course, been kept duly informed of the honour which had been done to his son, and on his chancing to see the stranger on the shore, a few days after he had been told the picture was finished, he asked to look at it. The painter was sorry that he had not got it with him, but promised to bring it next day, and asked if Gabriele himself would have any objection to being drawn.

"I shall not trouble you as much as your son," he said, "for I know your time is of more value than his; I only want to make a rough sketch, and I think I can get that done in an hour, or an hour and a half."

The fisherman felt a good deal flattered, and a



little shy—he liked the idea of being portrayed, but he was conscious that to sit as a model would excite the ridicule of his associates. And he soon found he was not wrong in this, for hardly had he been placed in a proper light and position before Michele happened to pass, and began at once to make a mock and a jeer at him, though, of course, only in a good-humoured way. The banter continued, until the artist asked the younger man to seat himself beside his friend, as he wished to put him too into the picture. After this, both felt more at their ease, they worked away diligently at their *nasse*, and were soon engaged in an amusing conversation with their new acquaintance. Whether the talk or the extension of the subject was to blame I cannot tell, but the sketch was not finished within the appointed time, and the painter asked the fishermen to be there at the same hour the following day. They promised to be so, and kept their word. During this second sitting Antonetta and Lucia happened to go down to the shore. Of course a conversation ensued, and then the artist opened his portfolio, and showed Vincenzo's portrait, and a number of other drawings. As soon as the women had left, he asked leave to paint Lucia. He wanted a fisher-girl of that age, he said, for a large painting, and he had seen no one that would suit him as well as she. Gabriele did not absolutely refuse, but he endeavoured to turn the conversation. His heart had been set on possessing Vincenzo's portrait ever since he first saw it, and yet he did not know how to ask for it. At last he blurted out the blunt question, "How much would it cost?"

"Oh, I don't make such things as that for sale," was the reply, "but I'll tell you what; one good turn deserves another. You have sat for me, and if you will let me draw your daughter as well, I'll copy the picture for you, and give it you in a nice frame."

Gabriele was still uncertain, but when he talked

the matter over with his wife she was strongly in favour of accepting the proposal. It would be such a nice thing to have a picture of the boy, she urged, and he himself would be so glad to see how he looked as a child when he grew to be a man.

"Why you and I scarcely know what each other's faces were like when first we met," she said with a smile, and then she went on to argue that there could be nothing to object to in the matter. The artist might come up to their house to make the portrait, and she would take care that he was never alone with Lucia for a single minute.

Gabriele felt he had nothing but a vague dislike to the whole affair to urge in reply, and so he told the stranger that he might paint his daughter on condition that he did it in the house, and promised not to sell or give away the picture to any one in Naples.

Lucia's portrait took a long time, and afterwards there was a sketch to be made of Raffaella, and then of Donna Agata. But, on the other hand, the stranger was better than his word, for he not only gave them the copy he had promised, but a pretty little picture of the whole family, from which only Antonetta was absent. He was sorry she was not there; but she had positively refused to be drawn, he told Gabriele; he wanted the picture to be a surprise, and it was too late to alter it now.

Even after all was done he continued to call at the house on his way up and down to the shore. The fisherman did not like it, but Antonetta met all his objections with some merry jest, and, when she saw that would no longer do, she asked him, quite seriously, whether it would be so great a misfortune if a foreign gentleman, who seemed to have plenty of money, should happen to fall in love with Lucia. That was quite a new thought for him. He would certainly rather that his daughter married in his own class. But he had not done so, as his wife reminded him,



and, if the girl made a different choice he felt it would be best for him not to interfere. So things went smoothly for a time.

Donna Agata was the first person whose suspicions were excited, and she threw every difficulty that she could in the way of her daughter's meetings with her lover. For a time Antonetta bore this silently, if not patiently, but before long she found these checks on her passion intolerable, and she began to feel something very like hatred to her mother. From this time their daily life became a series of quarrels, for Antonetta, who had hitherto been so good-natured, was now provoked to anger by every little thing. At last the old woman's patience entirely gave way, and, when they were alone, she accused her child of infidelity to her husband.

"It is just like you," was the reply, "to invent such a lie about your own daughter, because you happen to be out of humour. But, if it were so, do you think I would be balked of my will by a woman who lives upon my charity? Mind your own business, and hold your tongue."

That evening Donna Agata left the house. She told Gabriele she was only going to spend a week or two with Giulia, but both mother and daughter had resolved that the parting was to be for ever.

Giulia could not allow her sister to go to her destruction without endeavouring to warn her, so she went to her and tried to speak kindly on the subject; but she was at once checked by a bitter reference to her own past. On the following day she went again, and spoke only of indifferent matters.

"She must not feel that there is any bitterness between us," she said to Salvatore, "or it will be harder for her to come to me when she wants me."

And now Antonetta had no one to watch and thwart her, but was able entirely to abandon herself to the passion that had transfigured her life. There

was nothing in her own heart that fought against it ; she felt no scruple and no remorse. She had bidden her lover pay particular attention to Lucia whenever any of the neighbours were by ; he had done so, and she saw that he had gained the girl's heart. But this excited no compunction in her mind. It was pleasant to see another longing for that which she possessed. And yet she was not happy. She was haunted by a constant dread that her husband might discover her secret. Even in her gladdest hours that was there, as a dark background to all her joy, and there were times when it filled her whole heart with horror. If only Gabriele could be put out of the way. She dared not do it. He was so strong and bold and self-possessed that he would certainly take her in the very act, and then, even if she succeeded, there was the law, with all its frightful consequences. No, she had not courage for that, and she felt that any suggestion of such a wish would alienate her lover from her. And yet she might be so happy—and she was—yes, she was so miserable.

One night, when she was pondering over these things, she remembered to have heard somewhere of a charm by which even women could rid themselves of their enemies. She could not recall all the particulars ; perhaps she had never heard them ; but still it was worth a trial. She rose early, and went to Santa Maria Piedigrotta, and filled a little vial with the holy water that stands at the door of the church. Then she bought a lemon and two or three little bundles of tooth-picks, and waited till night came on. Gabriele was at sea, and, when all the rest were soundly asleep, she poured out the holy water and baptized the lemon with his name, using the very words of the service as far as she could remember them, and not pausing to consider to what a use she was putting the sacred Name. Then she thrust the tooth-picks, one by one, into it, and finally put it



away in the back part of a drawer, where no one would be likely to find it. As the lemon shrivelled up, so her husband's body would wither, and then she would be free.

At first the neighbours were ready enough to suppose that Lucia was the object of the painter's visits. They took it for granted that he had come to an understanding with her parents, and that they would soon be married. It was clear to all that she was in love with him, and only those who were in love with her were inclined to blame her choice. But, after a time, people began to wonder why the betrothal was delayed so long. And then the girl did not look so bright and happy as she ought to do. Was the stranger only playing with her, after all, or was there some other attraction in the house? They began to watch, to suspect, and to talk lightly about Antonetta.

When Michele first heard a remark of this kind, he met it by an indignant denial, but afterwards found it more difficult to silence his own doubts than his wife's tongue. He could not help remembering that he had noticed a number of little things he could not understand at the time, but which this story, if it were true, would explain. It was clear to him that he must talk over the matter with Gabriele—but it was difficult to introduce such a subject.

Gabriele laughed at the suspicions which his friend suggested, but he was none the less affected by them on that account. This warning from without formed a centre round which all the former doubts and discontent which had existed in his mind suddenly crystallised. Long before the conversation came to an end he had made up his mind that Antonetta was in all probability false to him, and he had extracted, apparently by mere chance, trustworthy information as to the hours at which the painter usually visited his house. But still there was no proof of anything ;

he seemed to laugh at the whole matter, and parted from Michele with a jest.

A few days later, however, after making arrangements for being absent a considerable time, Gabriele suddenly returned.

Lucia, who was the first to observe his approach, rushed into the house, and cried out "Mother, father is here!" so that the lovers had just time to escape before he entered; but the proof of their guilt was too apparent to be doubted or concealed.

Gabriele sat quietly down on a chair; Lucia had never seen him look as he did now. He wanted to think over what was to be done; but somehow he could not think, he was only dimly conscious that his life was ruined. After a while Vincenzo, who had been sent out to play, ran in. He was awed by his father's stern, mournful face, but not frightened; he crept softly up to him, and stood quite quietly between his knees for a minute or two. Then he laid his hand upon his cheek, and Gabriele bent down and kissed him.

Meanwhile, Antonetta had acted with great decision and presence of mind. After giving her lover one last, long kiss—what did it matter who saw it now?—she hurried to the police station and informed the highest official there that her husband possessed a knife longer than the regulations permitted, and that she believed her life was in danger from his violence.

The former charge seemed to him more important than the latter, and he at once despatched three constables to search the house. The knife was of course found, as a similar one would have been in the house of every fisherman in Mergellina if it had been searched. Gabriele was brought before the authorities and condemned to three days' imprisonment.

That was all that Antonetta wanted. Would it



not give her lover time to bear her away beyond the reach of pursuit? What could he desire more than that? She desired nothing more. She would, perhaps, have to leave her children behind; but, if she were always with him, she felt she could forget them. And she would be always with him now.

When Salvatore heard of what had happened, he felt as strongly as any of his companions that Antonetta had been guilty of an act of the basest treachery in appealing to the police, and yet he was thankful she had done so, as it might prevent a murder. He sought out Don Antonio, told him the whole story, and entreated him to warn the painter. This Don Antonio readily consented to do; and before evening the stranger was informed by his landlord, quite casually, in the course of conversation, that in such cases there was no escape from the *vendetta* of the Neapolitan fishermen except by instant flight. He needed no second warning. He had never at any time cared enough for Antonetta to expose himself to any serious inconvenience for her sake, and he was beginning to weary of her fierce tenderness and wild fits of jealousy. He packed his things in haste and started for Rome by the night train, without even bidding her farewell.

"If I had dreamed that he was such a coward," muttered Michele, when he heard the news, "I would have taken the matter in hand myself."

At first Antonetta refused to believe she was deserted, but when on the following day her lover did not appear at the appointed time she began to doubt, and sent Raffaella to his lodgings to inquire about him. Yes, he was really gone. She was left to care for herself then; well, she would do it. She had some money to begin with, and there were ways enough of earning a livelihood. She took a room at some distance and bade her children prepare to move into it.

Her daughters obeyed silently, but Vincenzo rebelled. "I will never desert my father," he said bitterly, and then hurried off to Michele, who called him a brave boy, and said he would take care of him until Gabriele's sentence had expired.

That night, when Antonetta went to bed, she found that Lucia was still awake and weeping bitterly.

"What is the matter?" she asked, almost sharply.

"Oh, mother, I love him too," sobbed the girl, endeavouring to throw her arms round her neck.

"You loved him, you mean; you cannot love the traitor now."

"Oh, mother, I sometimes feel as if I hated him, and yet I know that if he were here I should forgive him everything."

"I wish he were," replied Antonetta, "that I might run this knife into his heart."

When the hour of Gabriele's release came, Michele and Vincenzo were waiting at the prison door to receive him. They took him to a little *trattoria* close by, and there told him all that had happened. He had felt so lonely and forsaken before that the story of the new desolation of his home hardly affected him, but his boy's faithfulness brought tears into his eyes. In about half an hour Don Antonio entered, and the whole company withdrew into an inner room.

Gabriele here declared that it was his fixed intention to do nothing whatever for the support of Antonetta. If his daughters chose to return to his house, and would promise to hold no intercourse whatever with their mother, he would care for them as he had always done; if not, he would have nothing more to do with them.

Don Antonio saw that it would be hopeless to attempt to alter this resolution in the present state of the fisherman's feelings, so he gave his assent to it, but he begged, as a personal favour, that the



injured man would promise him to be guilty of no act of violence against Antonetta.

Michele's brow clouded at once, and his friend clenched his teeth at this proposal, but Vincenzo put his hand upon his father's and said, "Oh, you *will* promise; you do not want to maim or hurt mother."

Gabriele looked into the eyes that were lifted to his; he saw that they were brimmed with tears, and remembered that, among all his children, this one alone had been true to him in the day of his misfortune; so he made the promise.

Don Antonio was by no means entirely satisfied with the arrangement to which he had assented, but he was willing to give it a fair trial. If the daughters could be induced, or compelled, to return to their father's house, that, doubtless, would be the best thing; but, if not, some provision must be made for them, as he was anxious above all things to keep the matter out of the lawyers' hands, and he felt no certainty that Antonetta might not suddenly appeal to them. So, after about a fortnight had passed without their showing any inclination to give way, he once more addressed Gabriele on the subject. He at first found him quite immovable. His one answer to every argument was: "Not one soldo shall they have until they submit."

"Very well," replied Don Antonio, at length. "No one can dispute your decision; but it is rather hard that Salvatore should have to keep the whole family."

"What right has he to do that?" asked the fisherman fiercely.

"You know neither he nor his wife act like other people. Do you believe that either of them would let her sister, or your children, starve?"

This was a point of view that had never occurred to Gabriele. He pondered it over for a considerable time in silence, and then said abruptly:—

"I will tell you what I will do. I will allow the girls sixteen soldi a day between them; but one of them must fetch the money every evening at seven o'clock from the *trattoria* where I sup. They must come themselves, turn and turn about."

Don Antonio was satisfied; he felt that the humiliation implied in the condition was one which the father had a perfect right to inflict.

Three days later Gabriele felt almost inclined to revoke the concession he had made. In searching for something that had been lost he had turned out a drawer that was seldom used, and discovered the lemon pierced with tooth-picks. He knew well enough what that meant, and hastened to take it to a monk who was reputed to be experienced in such things. The monk promised to counteract the charm, and gave him medals to protect him from its power. But, on his way back, Gabriele asked himself whether there was any reason that he should contribute to the support of those who were endeavouring to compass his death, and had almost concluded there was none, when he remembered the pale faces and humble mien with which his daughters received their daily dole, and concluded, on reflection, that they were probably ignorant, at least, of the infernal arts their mother had practised.

So things went on for some four or five months. Gabriele and Vincenzo were always together, day and night. Grazia and Michele's wife looked after their clothes, and did what small woman's work they needed, and Giulia would willingly have borne her part as well, but, as she refused to break off all intercourse with her sister, her brother-in-law declined her help. He was not angry with her and Salvatore, but he was estranged from them. They might perhaps be acting rightly, but he could not be a friend of any one who remained on a friendly footing with Antonetta. He and Vincenzo always took their



meals abroad, and when he remained late in the *trattoria*, as he was becoming more and more accustomed to do, the boy would stretch himself out at length on the bench beside him, pillow his head upon his father's knee, and sleep there soundly enough until it was time to go home. The great event of the evening was the payment of the money, and it invariably took place in this wise. The girl whose turn it was would come up to the table and stand opposite to Gabriele, and then the following dialogue would ensue :—

“ Good evening, father.”

“ What do you want ? ”

“ The money for me and my sister.”

Here the fisherman would take out his purse, and count out the sum, soldo by soldo, upon the table ; the girl would take it, say, “ Thank you, father,” and withdraw. That was all the intercourse that took place between the two divisions of the family. The words were never varied, and everybody in the room was silent as long as the ceremony lasted.

One evening, however—it was in the beginning of Lent, and, as I have said, between four and five months after the great catastrophe had occurred—Raffaella said : “ Would you mind giving me the money for two days to-night, father ? We want to go and hear the preachers to-morrow.”

Gabriele said nothing, but he counted down thirty-two soldi upon the board.

Next evening the *trattoria* was empty. Everybody, it seemed, had gone to hear the preachers who were holding a mission in the Church of Santa Maria Piedigrotta. Gabriele was not inclined to go to church. He did not feel that the way he had been treated by the celestial powers was such as to encourage any special devotion on his part ; so Vincenzo and he ate their supper in silence, and went home earlier than usual. The boy was soon fast

asleep, but the father lay awake for hours. His eyes rested upon his mother's old chair : " Ah, if she were only alive now, the house would not be so lonely and desolate." Then he remembered the first happy year of his marriage. Surely Antonetta had loved him then. And how bright she had been, and what funny ways she had, in those old days ! And then the joy when Lucia was born ; and it had all ended in this ! He knew there was no use thinking about it, but one detail after another forced itself upon his memory, and he had constantly to remind himself—" And, after all, she wanted to kill me !" to check the up-welling of the old tenderness. It was past midnight when he fell asleep.

Antonetta had set doggedly to work to secure herself a livelihood independent of Gabriele. She knew all her neighbours regarded her with contempt, and she repaid their scorn a thousandfold. She hated her parents for having put her to live among this set of fisher-folk : she hated her husband for having married her ; most of all she hated her lost lover. She viewed even her own daughters with dislike, though she treated them with the greatest indulgence, because she knew it vexed Gabriele that they should remain with her. She was at war with the whole world, and she had ceased to wonder, or to care, what might become of herself. There was only one thing of which she was certain ; she might be broken—but she would never bend—no, not to the saints, no, not to God. Let them do their worst.

At first she had hated Giulia and Salvatore as much as all the rest ; but by degrees her heart softened to them. They, at least, had not ranged themselves against her, and they did not seem to look down upon her ; above all, she had done no wrong to them, as she felt she had to her own children.

One day, shortly after the separation from her husband, she said passionately to Giulia, who had



been helping her to get her room in order and trying to draw her out of herself—"Why don't you leave me? you know I deserted you when you were in trouble."

"No, no, you didn't, Netta," was the reply, "your husband would not let you come to me, and you were obliged to obey him, and you know you wanted to send me money."

The words had a strange effect on Antonetta. Did Giulia really hate Gabriele then? She had cause enough; of course she was too pious to acknowledge it. Antonetta knew very well that women may have feelings in their hearts that they do not like to confess even to themselves, and the more she thought it over the more she became convinced that her sister must be rather glad that Gabriele was not so very happy. She never broached the subject again, but the silent community of feeling which she suspected was a tie to knit her to Giulia, who soon gained a greater power over her than any other human being.

On one point, however, Antonetta was obstinate. She could not be persuaded to go to church, or to take part in any religious service. Her daughters might do as they liked, but, so far as she could see, church-going had never been of any use to her, and she didn't intend to waste any more time upon it. Such talk shocked Giulia, and she gave up the subject in despair. What then was her surprise when her sister suddenly announced her intention of going to hear the Lenten preachers! If she had known the cause of this change of mood she would probably have felt less thankful than she did.

Antonetta had overheard two women talking about her. The one had said:—

"Well, she does seem to have some sense of decency left, for she's ashamed to show her face at church."

"And well she may be," was the reply.

So that was what people thought, was it? She would show them they were wrong. And she dressed herself out in her choicest clothes, to dare the eyes of the whole congregation.

She chose the most conspicuous place she could find. Her daughters and Giulia were seated behind and beside her. Salvatore, of course, was among the men on the other side of the church. She knew well enough that everybody was looking at her; but as soon as she caught any one's eyes they sank before hers, and for a time it amused her to abash those who had said she was ashamed to show her face. A platform had been erected on one side of the church, and a priest was walking up and down it, and talking something about the sacraments, which had no interest for her. When she looked fixedly at him, he, too, moved his eyes away. Her heart beat high. There was no one in the church who dared meet her glance. If Gabriele had been there she felt sure his eyes would have quailed before hers. She looked down all the benches on which the men were seated, and was rather disappointed not to see him.

Afterwards there was a pause; a hymn was sung and a new priest mounted the platform. He was a little old man, with an exceedingly mobile face and voice, and he spoke the broadest Neapolitan dialect. Antonetta didn't want to listen to him, but she found that nobody was looking at her now, and, as she could not get out through the crowd, she was obliged to sit still. It was impossible not to hear what he said, and soon her eyes, like those of all the rest of the audience, were fixed upon him. He was mimicking a girl going to Mass with her mother, and thinking only of her finery and the lovers she might attract.

It was very clever, just what Giulia and she had done in the old times, when they were girls, and she laughed heartily at it, as everybody else in the church did. It was the first time she had laughed for



months. Then came a representation of two drunken men, and a number of other popular scenes, and she soon became so interested in the exhibition, that she quite forgot herself and the other spectators. Finally the preacher gave a picture of illicit love, too frank to be described to English readers, but his audience were not offended by it. Antonetta, for her part, only felt its truth. It was thus, then, that the great romance of her life looked to other eyes. She could not deny it would have looked thus to her if it had happened to any one but herself. And, when seen in this way it looked very funny, and, she must own, a little contemptible.

Then there was again a pause, a prayer, and a hymn, and a rich, full voice sounded through the church: "Do you know who He is?" The platform was empty, for the new preacher had mounted the pulpit. It had grown dark by this time, and the church was dimly lighted, so that the two candles threw a weird glamour over the tall, gaunt form of the speaker and the crucifix which he held in both hands, high over the assembled throng:—"Do you know who He is?"

The history of the life and death of the Saviour followed.

Antonetta had been familiar with the story from her earliest childhood; but, somehow, it seemed to gain a new reality on this preacher's lips, and when at every pause in the narrative he said, "And He did this for you;" the tones, which were so soft and low that they seemed hardly to rise above a whisper, though they penetrated to the furthest corner of the church, went directly to her heart. Then the preacher proceeded to dwell on the good things which even the poorest and the meanest enjoy, the simple blessings which men accept without thought or thankfulness, because they are so common, but the loss of any one of which would make them miserable;

and still, at every pause, came the words :—" And all this He does for you." At length his manner changed, and he asked, " What have you done for Him ? " And, passing through the whole register of human sins, from the most venial of faults to the blackest of crimes, he repeated the question after each :—" Is that what you have done for Him ? " There was nothing harsh or accusing in the tone in which the words were uttered ; it seemed full only of such regret as we feel when we remember our offences against those who have loved us and are now no more. But again his whole voice and manner changed, and once more he lifted the crucifix on high, " There never was love like His," he exclaimed, " and yet, unless you repent, as certainly as to-morrow's sun shall rise, the day will come when He shall turn His back upon you, and say—' I know them not.' " Here he turned the back of the crucifix to the audience. There was a long pause, and a sound as of mingled sobbing and moaning arose from the crowd below. The priest had replaced the crucifix and clasped his hands before he spoke again. " Thank God, that day has not yet come. Let us pray." The whole congregation sank upon their knees.

Antonetta never knew how she was brought to Giulia's house, which she had not entered since the day on which her mother had gone to live there ; but, as soon as she reached it, she fell at her full length on the floor, and lay there, moaning heavily. Every one tried to arouse and comfort her, but she took no notice of any of them.

Both her mother and her daughters were in despair, but Giulia wrote on a slip of paper the words—" You promised to come to me if I were in need of you—I am in great need now ; come quickly"—and gave it to her husband to take to Brother Francesco.

The monk accompanied Salvatore at once, and on



the way he was able to gather a general idea of the purpose which had induced Giulia to send for him. As soon as he had entered the house he went up to Antonetta and said: "Rise, my daughter." She instinctively obeyed him, and he led her into the inner room.

For more than two hours the rest of the family remained without, speaking only now and then in low undertones, as people are accustomed to do outside the door of a sick room when they are awaiting the approach of death.

At last the door opened and Antonetta appeared. She was very pale, but the wild light had quite died out of her eyes, and she said softly: "Will you come with me, Giulia? I must go to my husband."

"We had better follow them," said Brother Francesco to Salvatore, as soon as they had left the house.

They kept the women in sight, and walked on without speaking. The fisherman concluded, from the bent head of the monk and the movement of his lips, which he remarked as they were passing a lamp, that his companion was praying silently.

Antonetta had started on her way with the sole intention of making every atonement in her power for the sin she had committed; but, as she approached her former home, the memories of the days when first she entered it awakened within her. She left her sister at the door, and entered the house alone. It seemed strange to her how little had been altered. The furniture was all in its accustomed place, and the little oil lamp was still burning before the picture of the Virgin, and there was Gabriele lying beside Vincenzo on the bed. As soon as she looked upon him she was overcome by a passion of grief and tenderness. He had not deserted her in her need. Rough and harsh as he sometimes was, she knew he would have spent the last drop of his blood for her sake. She had lost him now, lost him by her own



176 STORIES OF NAPLES AND THE CAMORRA

fault. She knelt at the end of the bed, and uncovered his feet, and kissed them. The fisherman started up and sprang to the middle of the floor, but she clung to his knees, her hot tears fell upon his feet, and then she stooped and kissed them again. He would have liked to shake her off, but he felt that he could not use force against the weak, broken woman.

"Get up, and go away," he said. "What have you to do here?"

The only answer was to clasp his knees more firmly, and to kiss his feet.

"Stop, stop," he said, "you must not do that;" but his voice had grown more gentle. "It is right to kiss the feet of the Lord upon the Cross, but it is wrong to kiss any human being's feet."

"The Lord Christ is more merciful than men," she sobbed, "He forgives those who sin against Him, if they repent."

He bent down and tried to lift her from the ground.

"No, no, not until you have forgiven me," and for the first time the pale, beseeching face was lifted to his.

"I do forgive you," and he was about to clasp her to his breast, but she escaped from him.

"Not yet, you don't know all yet; I must tell it you first. I hated you,—oh, I love you more to-night than I have ever done before—but I hated you, and I wanted you to die, and I took a lemon——"

"Never mind, I know all about that," he said with a smile, and the next moment she was folded in his arms.

On the following morning Gabriele and Antonetta went together to San Giuseppe to thank God for their reunion.

Giulia joined her husband and Brother Francesco as soon as her sister had entered the house, and they



walked up and down the street together for about half an hour.

At last the monk said :—" I do not think we need wait any longer ; it is not likely he will use any violence now."

So they turned to go.

After a time Salvatore said, with a good deal of hesitation, " Father, Giulia and I have a favour to ask of you."

" And a very strange one too," added his wife.

" What is it ?"

" Why, we hope we shall be having a child some day soon, and we want you to stand god-father for it——"

" Yes," interrupted Giulia eagerly, " and, if it is a boy, we are trying to save up all our money so that he may be a priest."

" I will gladly be god-father to any child of yours," replied Brother Francesco, " but had we not better leave it to God to decide what He wishes him to be ? Many a layman in the simplest calling does His work as truly as any priest."



DON ANTONIO

I

IN one of the smaller squares of Naples, whose name I have forgotten, there used to stand two of the stalls at which the good people of the town are accustomed to slake their thirst with such mild beverages as a glass of cold water from the Fountain of the Lion, or from the mineral springs of Santa Lucia, with the addition, by the more luxurious, of a few drops of not very inviting bitters, or a little lemon-juice. It is a good place for observing the dress and manners of the people, for the square opens upon a narrow but busy thoroughfare, and so a long line of foot-passengers is constantly passing opposite the water-stalls. A true Neapolitan who is obliged to be out in the summer heat will readily make a circuit of a quarter of a mile for the purpose of using such a shady street, instead of being exposed to the glare and glow of the open places ; indeed, in such cases he will pick his way along, and avoid the sunshine with almost as much care as a cat avoids the puddles, when abroad on urgent business after a shower.

Let me invite you to accompany me to this square. It is about ten o'clock in the forenoon of a day in the second half of June, and, though the crowd is neither so great nor so varied as it would be at an earlier hour, or about sunset, there is much to observe that



will strike you as new and strange, if you are a foreigner. There, you see that little child toddling along with uncertain steps, and holding firmly by his mother's hand. Why is he clad in an exact imitation of the garb of the Franciscan Order? Are Neapolitan children precocious enough to renounce the world at the early age of five, or is that woman, with the careworn face, a zealous patriot, who decks out her son thus, in mockery of the Church? Neither. Poor little Cicillo has always been a sickly child, and doctor's stuffs, we all know, cost a great deal, and help but little. But the saints could help if they would, and St. Francis was always tender-hearted and good to children. He would certainly make little Cicillo well if he could only be got to notice him. But then, there are so many children in Naples—so many sick children—that the chance is that, even if he looks that way, he will not see him. So the mother, like others of her class, had those strange clothes made that they might catch the saint's eye, and at the same time remind her of what she then vowed. It is certain that he has been better since he put them on, and she left off giving him quack medicines, and took another lodging, with a window looking towards the south. If he gets quite well, frock and cowl will be laid aside, but she trusts he will always retain a special devotion to St. Francis. She herself, you see, wears a dress of claret colour, trimmed with lines of white tape, which is certainly more striking than becoming, though age and exposure to the weather have now softened down its tone, and lent it some of the grace of antiquity. It was neither vanity, bad taste, nor poverty, which prompted her choice of this array. When she had a touch of fever, about a year and a quarter ago, she promised San Ciro that, if he would heal her, she would have this dress made in his honour. These are his colours, and this is the pattern which he is supposed to approve.



180 STORIES OF NAPLES AND THE CAMORRA

When a Neapolitan woman is ill, she is fond of vowing that she will order a new gown as soon as she gets better, and, if the case is a piteous one, half-a-dozen of her neighbours will sometimes join in the vow. When this happens the husbands are generally obliged to give their consent, though they may occasionally hint that the piety which prompts such acts of charity is not entirely unalloyed with a female love of finery. However, they too have their compensation, for every such dress involves a visit to Portici on the next San Ciro's day, and, though the men may be less devout than their wives and daughters, they love the crowd, the noise and the fireworks at least as well.

San Ciro was a physician in his lifetime, and, as he is the patron of Portici, it is natural that the people of that town should call him in when they are sick ; but he is by no means the only saint who helps in case of need. If you prefer a dress of grass-green stuff, trimmed with yellow ribbons, you may make your vow to Santa Anna, his great rival in the esteem of the lower classes. The Madonna del Carmine wears a white dress with black facings, and imposes the same colours on her votaries ; while the Madonna Addolorata dresses entirely in black, and it is to one of these that those who stand somewhat higher in the social scale usually make their appeal. A large variety of saints and colours, as you see, is open to the choice of the sick ; but perhaps, on the whole, San Ciro is as good as any.

But who comes now in the great gilded chair borne by two porters ? It is covered, you observe, by a solid dome, supported by four pillars, and surmounted by an angel. The inmate is evidently bound on some visit of state, for she is decked out in her smartest clothes, and the roof of her gorgeous vehicle is ornamented by four gigantic nosegays. That is the *levatrice*, who is taking the child she has lately assisted to bring into the world to be christened.



You can tell at once that it is a girl, by her carrying it on her left arm. Such women play an important part in the family life of Naples, and have at least a nominal voice in matters which have nothing whatever to do with their profession. Every child looks upon the one who assisted at its birth as a relation, and by public opinion she is placed only a little lower than a godmother.

But hush! take off your hat, a funeral is passing. First comes the cross, borne on high by a figure dressed in a peculiar garb. The lower part of the dress resembles that of a monk, except that it is made of white linen, but the whole of the head is concealed by a cowl of the same material, which hangs loosely down to about the middle of the body. The holes left for the eyes give the face, at a distance, something of the appearance of a skull. Side by side with the bearer of the cross walk two men, bare-headed, but dressed in deep purple, and the three are followed by a long procession of men, attired exactly like the first, and carrying large wax candles. Then comes the bier; the heavy folds of the velvet pall prevent your seeing any part of the bearers except their feet, but both it and the coffin which surmounts it are gaily gilded and decorated. A number of old men dressed in blue, with gray cloaks, follow, each of them with a little black flag surmounted by a gilded picture, either of the cross, or of a skull and cross-bones. These are the poor of the hospital of San Gennaro, and they are supported by charity, on condition of their attending such funerals as this. The whole funeral has been arranged by a fraternity. Almost every Neapolitan belongs to some such society, to which he subscribes a small sum monthly, in order that, when his hour is come, he may be borne to the grave in pomp; and, as soon as he is dead, the brotherhood take possession of the body, decorate the room in which it lies in a befitting manner, and



182 STORIES OF NAPLES AND THE CAMORRA

take the whole expense and management of the interment upon themselves.

There was a hush while the funeral passed, but now the current of life rolls on as noisily and brightly as before. Every now and then a passenger leaves the stream to refresh himself with a glass of lemon or sulphur water. One of the stalls, you see, is as bright as new paint, furbished brass, and a large display of glasses and lemons can make it; the other is as dingy and uninviting as its neighbour is brilliant, and yet, though it offers exactly the same wares, at the same price, it does ten times the business of the rival establishment; indeed, three or four persons often stand waiting before it, while the only stray customers who ever visit the other evidently belong to a better class than the majority of the passers-by, or are strangers to that part of the town. You may perhaps be inclined to attribute this to a disinterested love of dirt for its own sake, or, if you are in a more charitable humour, you may fancy that the purchasers are prompted to make their choice by a habitual preference for the older water-stall, or a wish to give their half-penny to the poorer of the two tradesmen. I have held each of these theories in turn, and will not, at present, try to decide between them; all I know is that, whenever I have passed the square, the dingy stall has been visited by the customers for which the brilliant one waits in vain.

Do you see that man who is coming over to quench his thirst? If you do not remember the Don Antonio who so opportunely interposed to prevent Peppiniello's sudden vengeance about a year ago, and whose assistance to both Gabriele and Salvatore was so valuable, you will hardly be likely to remark him. Indeed, at the first glance, he seems almost the least noticeable of all the figures that have passed. He evidently belongs to the respectable classes, and, to judge from his dress and manner, you would probably suppose



him to be the head clerk of a second-rate commercial house. The former is studiously neat, but a little behind the fashion, and somewhat worn at the seams and edges. He is thin and sinewy, and rather below than above the middle height. He has dark, quick eyes, and thick, coarse black hair, which inclines to curl, but is kept cut short according to the prevailing custom. The beard, which covers all the lower part of the face, is not allowed to encroach on the front of the shirt, which is scrupulously clean, and the dark kid gloves are somewhat the worse for wear, and sit loosely on the hands. He evidently knows the business importance of personal appearance, and, as his mind is too much occupied by other matters for him to attend to them himself, he leaves them to his tailor, his hairdresser and his laundress, and so follows the fashion unconsciously, and generally at a little distance. For the rest, you guess his age to be about forty, and he has not taken the trouble to pluck out the few gray hairs that are beginning to appear on his head and chin.

What strikes you as strangest about him is his sauntering gait, and the interest with which he seems to observe everything that is going on around him. But Naples is not London, and whoever is obliged to walk its streets in the height of summer will soon learn to do so slowly, since nature has there forbidden, under the severest penalties, the smart pace affected by men of business who issue from Broad Street Station in the early hours of the forenoon. Perhaps this is the reason why every Neapolitan keeps his eyes open to the doings of his neighbours, and seems to derive a fund of amusement from a thousand street incidents which the Englishman has no time to notice.

What would strike a person better acquainted with the life of Naples more is the fact that not a single article of jewellery is visible on Don Antonio's person.



184 STORIES OF NAPLES AND THE CAMORRA

No relic of youthful vanity and extravagance suggests memories of a time when he, too, was ambitious of catching the eyes of the ladies who sip their ice in the Villa of a summer evening, or of dazzling the imagination of their nursery governesses, who frequent its walks at an earlier hour in the winter. If you look more closely at his face, you will remark that, though by his dress and manner he evidently belongs to the middle class, the form of his forehead and the cut of his nostrils at once recall the type of the lower orders. His feet, too, are unusually broad, unless his boot-maker be a man entirely destitute of honour and conscience. His lips you cannot see, for he allows his moustache to grow to its full length, and strokes it downwards, so as entirely to conceal his mouth, a habit very unusual in Naples, except with those who have bad teeth—and his, you see at a glance, as soon as he speaks or smiles, are perfectly sound and white.

In short, a quite commonplace, unnoticeable man. Watch him closely and you will find he does some noticeable things. He has just finished the glass of lemon-water which he ordered at the dingy stall, like the rest, and he offers a paper lira in payment. If you can get close enough, you will see that he receives twenty-one instead of nineteen soldi in exchange. That is to say, instead of taking a halfpenny for the drink, the vendor has given him one, for the honour of his custom. If the man conducts business on these principles, it is easier to understand why he secures so large a number of purchasers than how he manages to make both ends meet of a Saturday night. If you look in the shrewd, sharp, miserly face, however, he does not seem a man whom it would be easy to over-reach.

Let us follow Don Antonio a little way ; we can do so, as we are invisible ; if those bright eyes of his could, by any chance, catch a glimpse of us, we might not find it so easy to trace his steps. He turns into



the first tobacconist's shop, chooses a Cavour cigar, which he does not light, again offers a lira in payment, and again receives, instead of spending, a soldo. In this way he makes a number of small purchases, and always the sum which he receives above what is tendered in payment is the exact value of the article which he buys.

By the time he has reached the Toledo his pockets are full of coppers. There, a number of money-changers, both male and female, are always seated at the corners of the side streets, with little heaps of soldi piled up on the tables before them. They earn their living by changing paper into copper money, and charge two per cent. for the transaction. Don Antonio approaches the first of these, lays down nineteen soldi, and at once receives a paper lira. He repeats this profitable financial operation as often as he passes a stall, and by the time he has come to San Carlo he has got rid of half his coppers.

Now all this business has been done quite quietly and smoothly, without any of the bargaining which the Neapolitan seems to love so well, and which foreigners who are unfortunate enough not to be millionaires find at once so irksome and so unavoidable.

II

WHEN Don Antonio reaches the end of the Toledo he pauses for a moment. The Piazza del Plebiscito, which lies before him, is one wide field of scorching sunshine, and he seems to feel a physical reluctance to enter it, similar to that which makes a bather linger shivering on the brink of a river before taking his first header. He must have important business in that direction, for, after a second or two, he puts up his white umbrella and walks on. At Santa



186 STORIES OF NAPLES AND THE CAMORRA

Lucia he pauses to drink another glass of water. While he is doing so, a man who has been waiting by the boats below comes up the steps and addresses him. The new-comer is a tall, well-built man, and his dress, which is neither torn nor patched, is made in a style between that of a fisherman and a coasting sailor. He may be either, or perhaps both. Though his tone is low, and his manner respectful, it is clear, from the gestures which he vainly endeavours to repress, that he is both excited and angry. A policeman who has been lounging about among the fishermen now saunters up the steps, in the most innocent and natural way. Don Antonio remarks him, however, and conveys the information to his companion at a glance, so that all that the representative of the law hears in passing is the quiet words :—

“If you think it is too little, there are plenty more boatmen down there.”

“But remember the heat, sir.”

“Well, say twelve soldi.”

“I will be ready in five minutes, if you will wait in the shade.” In less than that time both are seated, and the boatman is rowing lustily in the direction of the harbour. As soon as they are well out of earshot of the land, he resumes the conversation, in the tone of a man who is indignant at a wrong suffered from the hands of one whom he feels to be his superior.

“We have always paid regularly. Even in the worst times we were never a day behind.”

“I know it.”

“And it was the best basketful we have had all the month.”

“Where was it left?”

“In the usual place.”

“And you?”

“We were in the café, of course. We can hardly have been away for twenty minutes, and when we came back the fish were gone.”



"It is now nearly eleven ; by one o'clock they will be there again."

"Half spoilt, and sale-time past."

"I will see to that. Pull for the porto."

No further word is spoken for a time. The rower works more vigorously than before ; Don Antonio takes out his pocket-book, writes a few words on several different pages, tears them out, and rolls them into pellets, which he then allows carelessly to fall from hand to hand. When they have passed the light-house, he says :—

"When do you leave this evening ?"

"We meant to go at seven, but now, who knows ?"

"Who is in your boat ?"

"My brother and nephew."

"You can give me a sail as far as Donna Giovanna, but let your nephew be in the other boat. Remember to be punctual, at seven."

"Yes, sir."

Don Antonio springs ashore, still holding the little balls of paper carelessly in his half-closed hand, and takes his way upward, towards the city. His companion is immediately surrounded by a group of fishermen, who, by their dialect, evidently belong to one of the little villages which lie on the coast between Gaeta and Naples. But we may leave them to discuss their business, and follow our mysterious guide.

It is one of the hottest and perhaps the very sleepest hours of the day, for between twelve and one the cafés and taverns will begin to be filled with the men whose business or pleasure obliges them to lunch abroad ; and before the last of these has finished his coffee the evening tide of life will once more be rising in the streets. Everybody who can now lies stretched upon his bed or sofa, or, if neither of these articles of furniture is within his reach, he is at least seeking for a nook which will exclude as



188 STORIES OF NAPLES AND THE CAMORRA

much of the sunshine and allow as free an access to the sea-breeze as possible. The very *mozzonari* have left their posts—all but Peppiniello, who is lying half-asleep beside his wares. He has had bad luck to-day, and is unwilling to lose even the last poor chance of a customer. Besides, the place is well enough suited for a noonday nap, and, though he has had no lunch, he ate a bit of bread and an onion early in the morning, and so his hunger is not sharp enough to overcome the united impulse of his prudence and his indolence.

Don Antonio pauses before him, and, bending down as if to examine the old cigar-ends, lets the balls of paper he has been playing with fall just before the left hand of the child, as he turns heap after heap over with his finger. While doing so, he mutters a few names in a tone which would lead any passer-by to suppose that he was mentally cursing either the smallness of his means or the scantiness of the tobacco. Sleepy as the boy looks, he knows that he is wide-awake by the almost imperceptible movement by which he covered the pellets with his hand as soon as they fell. After a while, Don Antonio lifts his head, looks around, as if in search of another *mozzonaro*, moves onward for a few steps, then returns, places the full market value of the old cigar-ends in the vendor's hand, wraps the old newspaper on which they have been lying round them, puts the bundle into his pocket, and saunters into one of the narrowest of the lanes which lead towards the fish-market.

Meanwhile, Peppiniello stretches himself at full length, as if to complete his unfinished nap. Then he turns uneasily over on his back, and on the other side. No position seems to suit him; so he rises wearily and drags himself into one of the neighbouring streets. As soon as he has turned half-a-dozen corners, however, his steps quicken, and he walks



briskly towards his destination. He would run, but that might attract attention, and he holds the precious paper pellets in his hand.

Don Antonio seems to intend to lunch off fish to-day, for he pauses before a number of the market-stalls, and narrowly inspects the more modest lots. Nay, he enters into a conversation with several of the few salesmen who are still in their places, and, though the tone is unusually low for Naples, every passer-by would conclude, from his manner and gestures, that he was either criticising or bargaining for the fish. He is, in fact, making a judicial inquiry, the result of which we shall shortly see. Yet, at the last stall at which he pauses he buys nine fresh sardines, for which he pays the full market price, and, after carefully wrapping them in the sea-weed the dealer provides, and rolling them up in a newspaper he takes from his pocket, he carries them off in his hand.

He has not far to go. A turn or two brings him to a small *trattoria* whose look and smell would take away the appetite of most Englishmen. He enters a low, close room, in which various disreputable groups are sitting with wine or empty glasses before them, playing cards. Further on is the kitchen, which is separated from the parlour only by a slight projection of the wall. Here a landlady is seated before a sort of counter, on which stands a quantity of raw food. Behind her a huge fire is blazing, at which a cook, in the most spotless of white dresses, is preparing a number of different dishes. The whole is so arranged that, if you are of a suspicious disposition, you may watch the progress of your dinner from its earliest to its latest stage; and, to tell the truth, if you did so, I do not think you would find much to blame in the cleanliness of the cookery, though you might object to some of the ingredients.

Both the landlady and the cook welcome Don



190 STORIES OF NAPLES AND THE CAMORRA

Antonio with the greatest deference ; he says a few words, in the tone of a friendly superior, to both, gives his fish to the latter with particular orders as to the way in which they are to be prepared, and passes through an empty room behind the kitchen into a dark passage, which leads to a narrow flight of stairs. These bring him to a large, cool and airy room, from which the sunshine is excluded by grass mats fastened above and outside the windows, and hung over the balconies. One side is occupied by two iron bedsteads, each large enough to accommodate a small family, but they seem to be there for show rather than use, as the rest of the furniture is that of a tavern-parlour, not a bedroom. They, in fact, only serve for the noonday repose of the landlady's most respected guests. The cleanliness and cheerfulness of the place make it a strange contrast to the lower rooms, and it is entirely free from the plague of flies, which render them intolerable to any but the case-hardened.

Five men, who are sitting at a table with wine and fruit before them, rise when Don Antonio enters, and each fills his glass and offers it to the new-comer, who raises four of them to his lips with an inclination of his head ; but the fifth he politely refuses with a slight motion of his hand and a "Thank you, I've had enough," as he takes his seat at a side table. The others move their chairs so that none may sit with his back to him, and resume their seats and conversation. The one whose glass has been rejected is silent and moves uneasily upon his seat. The present, however, is no time for explanations, as a boy is spreading the table with a clean, though coarse, linen cloth, on which he places a plate of snow, and half a litre of the white wine of Capri—not the mixture which you and I drink under that name in the great restaurants, but the genuine article. The landlady procures two barrels of it a year from a cousin of hers



who has a vineyard on the island, and she keeps it for special guests and occasions. The fish are brought almost immediately, and they form no unsavoury dish, cooked as they are in a slight modification of a way much affected by the fishermen of Naples. Don Antonio is a man who enjoys both his lunch and his dinner, but perhaps he has another reason for eating so leisurely to-day. He finishes at last, however; the plates are changed, the fruit is brought, and the boy disappears. The man whose proffered glass Don Antonio refused at once approaches his table and stands before him in a position of the most servile humility. A long conversation ensues, which is conducted in the broadest Neapolitan dialect, and in tones so low that not a word is audible to any but the speakers. At its conclusion, our hero fills his glass and offers it to his companion, who raises it to his lips and at once leaves the room. He has confessed to a participation in the morning's theft and undertaken to restore the basket, filled with fresh fish, of a somewhat greater value than those stolen. All he had to plead in his excuse was that, though the boatmen were themselves irreproachable, some of the wares they brought to market belonged, not to them, but to another fisherman, who paid no tribute to the Camorra. These he was unwilling to give up; but all his objections were met, not by arguments, but by a simple command, which he knew it was best for him to obey.

Don Antonio does not remain long after he is gone. His office compels him at times to associate with those who belong to the distinctly criminal class, but he has no great liking for their company. Besides, he has more work to do; so, after paying the landlady the full price of his meal, in spite of her protestations, he goes on his way. She is quite sincere in saying that she would feel it to be an honour and pleasure to entertain him at any time without recompense, and



192 STORIES OF NAPLES AND THE CAMORRA

he is as fond of making little savings as most men. But power, after all, is dearer to him than money. He therefore scrupulously abstains from deriving any personal advantage from his position beyond what comes directly from his employers. He has his reward. Half of his vast influence is due to the fact that, among a class and population whose idea of honesty is by no means very strict, he is known to be absolutely incorruptible.

Hitherto, though his pace has been slow, he has always moved in a given direction, but now, while wearing the same air and gait, he begins to turn and double, in a way which is clearly intended to baffle any secret pursuit. It would of course be easy enough to follow his slow steps, but it would be impossible for you to do so long without his being aware of the fact. At last he opens the closed door of a house, and, passing through the hall, he reaches a street on the other side. And now his whole look and manner are changed. His eyes are eager, and the slowness of his pace seems due to weariness rather than indolence. You would take him for a man half exhausted by heat, toil, and hunger, and feel relieved to see him enter the first little *trattoria* on his way. Here he sinks upon a bench in the darkest corner, and orders a mess of soup with meat and vegetables in it, a piece of bread, and half a litre of wine. Though the room is perfectly empty, the landlord, who knows him well enough, treats him as a stranger. When the food is brought, Don Antonio pays for it, pours a little of the wine into his glass, and pushes all the rest away from him, with the gesture of a man who is too tired to eat. Then he pulls the paper of old cigar ends out of his pocket, opens and lays it on the table before him, takes a whole cigar out of his pocket, lights that, leans his head on his hand, and seems to fall into a deep reverie. In a few minutes he rises and leaves the house, with the same dreamy, absent-minded look.



As soon as he is gone, the innkeeper wraps the old cigar-ends once more in the paper, places them, together with the bread and wine, on a shelf, and puts the soup into a little earthen pot upon the hearth.

III

ABOUT half an hour after Don Antonio has left the *trattoria* Peppiniello enters it.

"Well, what do you want?" inquires the landlord, in no unfriendly tone.

"What I always want, cigar-ends."

"Well, you're in luck to-day, look here," and he reaches the packet from the shelf.

"Thank you," and the boy turns to go.

"Aren't you hungry?"

"A little."

"Well, sit down then."

Peppiniello needs no second invitation; the lunch which Don Antonio left untouched is soon spread before him, and the landlord watches him as he eats it, with good-humoured pleasure.

"It isn't everybody who can get such soup as that for nothing."

"Only those who have such generous friends as Don Gennaro."

"Oh, I didn't pay for it."

"Did you steal the bread and meat then?" There is nothing offensive in the boy's tone. He would think none the worse of his host if he really suspected him of having done so.

"No, no; but some people have friends in high places."

"The better for them. I dreamt one night I had an uncle who was a Cardinal. Did he pay for me?"

"Come, come, you know well enough who it was ;



194 STORIES OF NAPLES AND THE CAMORRA

but tell me, how did you get to know him?" The man's tone changes from that of simple banter to real curiosity.

"Get to know him? Why I know everybody, and everybody knows me," and Peppiniello, whose meal is finished, slips with a half bow from his seat, and vanishes through the door with a motion as rapid and silent as that with which a lizard darts into its hole, when it catches your eye fixed upon it.

"He's deep for a young one, he is," says Don Gennaro, with a laugh; and then after a pause, "and he's quite right too—quite right."

The question he had put, in fact, trenched on Peppiniello's most inviolable secret. As long as he can remember, certainly as long as he has been cast on his own resources, and so been brought into direct contact with the life of his class, he has felt a strange veneration for Don Antonio. All boys who are worth anything have heroes, and the passionate admiration which a German boy feels for the Emperor and the Crown Prince, for Moltke and Bismarck, or an Italian of the higher classes for Victor Emmanuel and Garibaldi, this little outcast has centred on the apparently common-place person whom he has often a chance of seeing with his own eyes. The very simplicity of his exterior made him appear grander to the child; his loneliness and apparent weakness imposed on his imagination. The King of Italy had his soldiers and his police, his courts of justice and his prisons; but here was a man who, without any of the paraphernalia of authority, was constantly thwarting the government, and enforcing a law which they detested, but which the people readily obeyed. And who could doubt that this was the true law of God and the saints, which wicked, hard and selfish men were trying to do away with, in order that they might steal the last penny out of the pockets of the poor? Who has not heard the story of Garibaldi's entry into Naples? For one single



day in its history all the classes of the city were then united, and all went out to welcome the new deliverer. All, Peppiniello thinks, except Don Antonio, who must surely have passed the day in the bitterest grief, fasting and praying at some saint's shrine, that the sin of his people might be forgiven. Twenty-four hours sufficed to unveil the impostor, and the fishermen and their friends turned away from him with horror. Why should he have refused to visit the Church of San Gennaro, unless he knew he had been guilty of such a crime that no miracle could be wrought in his presence? Then followed the secularisation of the monasteries, which used to feed the poor, and the taxes which took the bread out of their mouths. It is a long punishment for one day's sin, he sometimes thinks ; but he acknowledges that it is just. Do not men at times incur *vendetta* for what at first seems only a little matter, and do not the consequences then, too, fall on their innocent children ?

Several personal qualities contributed to raise Don Antonio in Peppiniello's eyes ; above all, his reticence of speech, the mystery that surrounded him, and his habitual self-command. No one ever saw him lose his temper, or heard him raise his voice in passion. Then there was the quiet courage with which he moved about under the very eyes of the police, who would give fabulous sums to get him into their power, and yet dare not lay a finger upon him. It must be confessed, too, that his respectable dress has all along exercised a certain influence on the mind of the boy, who is Neapolitan enough to feel an instinctive respect for every sign of social superiority. In other cases this deference is held in check by a feeling of suspicion rather than hostility. As he looks upon the wealthy—and a very small sum is wealth in his eyes—as belonging to a totally different order from himself, he would cheat and over-reach them without scruple whenever he had a chance, and no doubt

would ever enter his head that, if they thought of him at all, they would regard him in the same light. True, they often throw him a soldo or two, but what value have coppers to them? It is a part of the nature of things that gentlemen, particularly foreigners, should toss them about, and it is chiefly his own cleverness and good luck which he has to thank if they happen to fall in his way, though the saints have, now and then, a hand in it too. But here was a man who, with all the advantages he cannot help admiring, spent his life in fighting the battle of the poor.

Peppiniello, of course, invested the object of his adoration with every virtue on which his imagination loved to dwell, but what particularly delighted him was Don Antonio's cleverness and address. There were stories enough told about these, and he eagerly listened to them, pondered them over and ornamented them, until his memory was stocked with a whole circle of legends, of which his favourite character was the centre. All this admiration was perfectly disinterested. Peppiniello never for a moment imagined that his hero would stoop low enough to take any personal notice of him.

Don Antonio, however, had a habit of remarking everything that went on under his eyes, and long ago he was perfectly acquainted with the boy's history, circumstances and habits, and had formed a distinct estimate of his character. He had observed that he never forgot what he felt to be a benefit, and concluded that in a few years his memory would become equally retentive for injuries, and this, in Don Antonio's opinion, was the necessary basis of every manly virtue. Then the child was intelligent and frugal beyond his years; it was probable he would get on in life, and, if he did, it would certainly be well to secure his gratitude by giving him a little timely assistance. This, the agent of the Camorra had resolved, should not be wanting when an opportunity



offered, but there was no occasion to be in a hurry ; the child was still young, and the life he was leading was an excellent course of education.

Things had stood thus for some months when an event occurred which brought the two into personal contact. One morning at early dawn, while Peppiniello was prowling about in the neighbourhood of the vegetable-market, he noticed that the door of a café which was generally closed at that early hour was ajar. Here was a chance of a good harvest, as the room had most likely been left unswept in the evening, since it was a late house ; so in he slipped, and was soon groping his way about on his hands and knees between the chairs and under the tables. The outer room was dark, but there was light in the cabinet behind, which was divided from it only by a door, the upper part of which was of glass. A red curtain was drawn before it, but not so closely as entirely to conceal two policemen, who were seated within, conversing in a low tone. It was habit, rather than any distinct purpose, which prompted the boy to listen, but as soon as he had caught a word or two everything else was forgotten. He could not hear all that was said, nor did he understand all he heard, as the men did not employ the Neapolitan dialect. But one thing was clear ; a secret raid was planned for that very morning upon the agent of the Camorra in the neighbouring market. Peppiniello's first thought was of his hero, and how to bring him the news. He was at the door again in a minute ; but here an unexpected obstacle presented itself, in the person of the keeper of the café, who was just entering. The child's first impulse was to slink back again into the dark ; but the door might be locked on the inside and every moment was precious. Boldness was the best policy ; he gave the legs before him a sharp blow. Surprised at the unexpected attack, the man started a pace or two backwards, and thus gave his



198 STORIES OF NAPLES AND THE CAMORRA

assailant an opportunity of springing past him and running off at his quickest pace. It was not worth while to follow him. The café-keeper had a shrewd suspicion that it was the cigar-ends upon the floor which had procured his house the honour of this secret visit, and he was well aware that, if the guests in the inner room should find out how careless he had been in leaving the door ajar, he would lose their custom for ever. It was best to take no notice of the matter.

Frightened and eager as Peppiniello was, he had started in a direction different from that which he intended to take as soon as he was safe from pursuit. Such caution was so habitual to him as to have become almost instinctive. After turning two or three corners in quick succession, he ran for some thirty yards in a straight line, and then, looking round, and seeing there was no one upon his track, he made up his mind that he was safe, and stopped short. What was to be done now? He had several times met Don Antonio in a street which led to the market from the northern side of the town, but it was almost sunrise by this time, and he might have passed already—it would be best to go through the market and see. Thither, accordingly, he bent his steps, walking as rapidly as he could without attracting attention. When he had reached his destination, he sauntered about among the carts in a leisurely way, but with a look which induced such of the peasants as noticed him to keep a sharper eye than usual upon their fruit and vegetables. At last he saw the object of his search standing with his back to a cart, and conversing with a group of peasants and dealers. He could not speak before them, and how was a little beggar to attract his attention? Yet it was getting late; he must not wait. His mind was soon made up. He crept under the cart, and took hold of one of Don Antonio's feet, with a half-caressing motion of his hand.



Don Antonio did not start or show any sign of surprise, but he bent slightly down, and a single glance at the boy's eager face convinced him that he had something of importance to tell. Still he drew him from his hiding-place with a rough "What are you doing there, you little thief?" In doing this he contrived to turn his back to his companions, and to stand in a position which concealed both his own face and the boy's. In that moment he denoted by a distinct but silent movement of his lips, which only Peppiniello could see, the name of a neighbouring street. A swift glance of intelligence showed that the child had understood him; so he pushed him away with an angry "Get out of the way!"

Peppiniello slunk off as if he had just been detected in an attempt at petty larceny, but only for a few paces. Then he began to grin and cut capers indicative of the greatest contempt for the group from which he had just been expelled, and finally struck up a song and strolled towards the street into which Don Antonio had sauntered half a minute before.

Two or three turns brought them to a house-door which Don Antonio opened with a latch-key; he then ascended a flight of stairs, entered a room, and, turning his back to the window, faced the boy with a simple:—

"Now?"

Peppiniello told his story.

"You must go some messages for me."

"I am at your service, sir."

Don Antonio wrote a few words on five different slips of paper, and, rolling them into pellets, gave them to the child with exact instructions as to where, and to whom, they were to be delivered. He also showed him how to make a sign with his fingers to ensure attention. As each of the notes contained the same words, it did not matter to which of the persons indicated it was addressed.



200 STORIES OF NAPLES AND THE CAMORRA

"You are sure you quite understand me?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then make haste; I will not forget you, Peppiniello," he added in a softer tone, as he put a few coppers into the boy's hand, "but you must never tell anybody what has happened this morning, and if I pass you in the street you must make no sign that you know me."

"Never, sir."

The commissions had all been punctually executed before the little *mozzonaro* found time to wonder how it was that Don Antonio knew his name.

The success of the police was not very brilliant that morning, though a number of people were arrested on suspicion. Indeed the Lazzaroni say that the five men then taken, who were condemned to a domicile under police supervision in Ischia, were not only no agents of the Camorra, but persons who had incurred its displeasure.

That day, however, formed an epoch in Peppiniello's life. The sum he had received, it is true, did not appear unbounded wealth, even in his eyes, but somehow the world from thenceforth began to turn a smoother side towards him. The fruit-sellers allowed him to gather up the refuse without a growl, or even called him, if he was passing, when there happened to be an unusually fine lot of bruised, and therefore unsaleable, grapes, peaches, or apples. A cabbage, too, would frequently roll off a peasant's cart when he was standing near, and several of the keepers of the smaller *trattorie*, who had formerly hunted him away from their doors, now allowed him freely to visit their establishments as often as he liked in the way of business. Broken bread and eatables of all kinds had also become far more plentiful than they used to be. Nor was this all. When he paid his rent at the end of the month, he was told he might move the family bed to an empty space far nearer



the mouth of the cave, if he liked, and that nothing more would be charged for the new position than for the old one. Concetta seemed to share her brother's luck, as she found more frequent opportunities than formerly of earning a soldo or two, and a shopkeeper's wife made her a present of an old dress, which to her seemed gorgeous attire—for all which blessings Peppiniello returns heartfelt prayers to the saints, and is duly grateful to Don Antonio. The kindest thing that his patron has done for him, however, is unknown to the object of his benevolence. He has strictly forbidden all his criminal acquaintances to take any notice of the boy, and there is hardly a thief in Naples whom he does not know, or who would willingly incur his displeasure.

IV

YOU have now seen so much of Don Antonio that you may perhaps wish to know something of his earlier history; if so, I will tell you all I have been able to gather concerning it. In his childhood his father kept a *trattoria* in Posilipo. The city did not then extend so far in that direction as it does now, and, though the house was chiefly used by Neapolitan tradesmen, who love to interrupt the habitual frugality of their lives by a drive into the country and a hearty meal, of which all the members of the family partake, whenever the calendar affords a plausible excuse for such extravagance, it often happened that an English tourist, or a German artist who had taken an evening stroll, would prefer dining there to returning to the noise and dust of the town. Those who came once usually returned, for they were treated with especial consideration. A shady arbour in the little garden, which commanded



202 STORIES OF NAPLES AND THE CAMORRA

a fine view of the sea, was always reserved for such guests ; their table was spread with spotless linen, and the dishes they ordered were prepared with extra care. All these advantages were, of course, invisibly charged for in the reckoning, according to the landlord's estimate of the means at the disposal of his guest. In fact, if you dine in such places, your bill usually represents, not the value of the food you have consumed, but the innkeeper's computation of the length of your purse, and the consequent respect he feels for you. If it is unusually high, you should look upon it as a compliment rather than an attempt at extortion : it makes matters pleasanter for both parties. The charges made by Antonio's father, however, were always moderate, his customers rarely complained, and he would have been amazed to hear that anybody should imagine there was the slightest dishonesty in his method of conducting his business. His wares, in his opinion, were worth exactly what he could sell them for, and it was natural that persons who were well off should be willing to pay a higher price for them than those of more straitened means. Money had a smaller value for them. For the rest, he was a good-humoured man on the whole, though he was subject to violent fits of passion. Every Neapolitan knows that it is injurious to the constitution to repress these, or, indeed, any other emotion, and my host had far too great a respect for his health to make any effort of the kind.

His wife died during her first confinement, and the strong, sturdy woman with a loud voice, whom he married soon after, brought him no children.

Little Antonio was for years a weak and puny being, who tottered about the house, and would slink trembling into a corner and cry there silently whenever his father began to storm or his stepmother to scold, though their anger was never directed against him. Indeed, both loved and petted the boy, let



him do whatever he liked, and took no thought of his education. He had always been intelligent, however, and from his fifth year his health began to mend. At fourteen he was perfectly well and vigorous and exceedingly agile, though slightly made. In the meantime he had picked up a good deal of useful knowledge. He could ride, drive, and groom a horse, and manage a boat under any ordinary circumstances. No one in the house could wait at table as well as he did, and he would not have been at a loss if he had been asked to cook any of the simpler dishes which he served. His behaviour was unusually quiet for a Neapolitan boy ; he never contradicted his elders or openly disobeyed them, and he never got into a passion with any one. Yet his stepmother had already noticed that, if there happened to be a difference of opinion between him and his father, Antonio was sure to have his will in a week or two, and the servants knew that whoever thwarted him would be served out as soon as an opportunity occurred.

About this time an Englishman, Mr. Williams by name, began to frequent the *trattoria*. As he proposed to make several lengthened excursions in the neighbourhood, he wished to engage a Neapolitan servant, and took a fancy to Antonio, who had accompanied him on several of his shorter rambles. The father at first met the proposal with a decided negative ; he could not bear the thought of a separation from his only son. The boy thought differently of the matter, however, and, without showing any undue eagerness, he hinted to Mr. Williams that it might be as well to talk it over with his maternal uncle, who was a priest. The latter was flattered by the respect which a foreign gentleman showed him, and managed to place the offer before the landlord in so advantageous a light that he himself re-introduced the subject the next time the



204 STORIES OF NAPLES AND THE CAMORRA

Englishman visited his house. He had been taken aback by the proposal at first, he said, but he had thought it over since, and, if his Excellency were not already suited, his son would think it an honour to enter his service.

Antonio began his new course of life with a hearty goodwill, and in many respects he made an excellent servant, but English manners were a mystery to the young Neapolitan. He could see no impropriety in borrowing his master's telescope, or making use of his soap and washing basin when they happened to be handier than his own, and the familiarity of his discourse first amused, then irritated, and finally disgusted Mr. Williams. It is probable, therefore, that the connection between the two would soon have terminated if the Englishman had not been struck down by fever at Castel Volturno, during an excursion which he had undertaken for antiquarian purposes. Then, however, all the best qualities of the boy were brought to light. He at once took the whole management into his own hands, had his master brought by sea to Sorrento, sent by extra post for a distinguished doctor, and remained in the sick room by day and night. No trained nurse could have observed the medical prescriptions more punctually, no wife or sister could have been gentler or more constant in her care.

Mr. Williams was not ungrateful; he was touched to see how thin and pale the boy had grown, and the doctor told him that two days more in the marshes would have ended his life. After some consideration he resolved that he would take Antonio to France and England with him, see after his education, and find some opportunity of establishing him in life. Again the father objected, and again the clerical uncle succeeded in overcoming his objections.

For four years Antonio remained abroad in the service of Mr. Williams, and during that time he



learnt to read and write not only his own language, but also English and French, and had even acquired a smattering of German. In other respects he had received such a general education as was fitted for his position. He was quick and diligent, but seemed to possess no intellectual interests whatever, and never took a book into his hands except for the purpose of learning his lessons, or improving his knowledge of the language in which it was written. On the other hand, he had become a perfect servant, as he now added the deference and punctuality of an Englishman to the quicker intelligence and easier manners of an Italian. Of his honesty and fidelity he had given frequent proofs. Mr. Williams entertained no thought whatever of parting with him. At first, it is true, he had spoken of establishing him in life, and, if he had shown a special turn for any trade or profession, the plan might perhaps have been carried out; but Antonio was clearly born to be the best of servants, and it exactly suited the master's convenience that he should remain in that position.

You may judge, then, how great must have been the surprise of Mr. Williams when one day, in the early summer of 1858, his valet informed him that he wished to return to Naples. His father was ailing, he said, and desired, nay commanded, him to come back as soon as possible. Would not a month's or six weeks' holiday do? He could get to Naples and back easily enough in that time.

Antonio was fully sensible of all that his master had done for him, and would be delighted at any time to re-enter his service, but the duty he owed his father must outweigh every other consideration, and he could make no promise till he had seen and talked the matter over with him.

Mr. Williams was vexed and indignant. The change was inconvenient. Besides, he had a personal liking for the boy whom he had sought out and

trained, he was grieved to lose him, and a little hurt that he should wish to leave him. Still, it was difficult to reply to the reasons that had been advanced, so he answered with a not very gracious—"Very well."

Antonio left the room with a silent bow. He did not love his master. In the early days of their relation to each other, it is true, he had felt a strong affection for him, and, shortly after his recovery from the fever, he would have gone through fire for his sake. But those times and feelings had long passed by. It was only natural that, when the English gentleman had resolved to keep the boy about him, he should begin to train him into as close an imitation as might be of an English servant. At first he was very gentle in reproving his familiarities, but, as the memories of his sickness passed away, his tone became harsher and colder. Antonio now fully perceived that all these checks and reprimands had been necessary ; but they had inflicted a wound upon his pride which still ached whenever the memory returned. He had never been disrespectful according to the conceptions of his own countrymen ; nay, he had regarded his master with a veneration that a northern servant rarely feels. If he had been cursed or cuffed every now and then, in a fit of undeserved and unreasoning passion, he would have borne it patiently, without a word of reply, or any secret grudge ; but this icy distance chilled his affections to the root. He retained the position he had accepted, at first because he was too proud to return to his father and confess the failure of the scheme, and afterwards because he was intelligent enough to see that it was to his own advantage to do so. And, if he was to remain in Mr. Williams's service, it was obviously wisest to comply with all his wishes ; besides which, the boy had now no desire to be familiar with his master, who would often remark to his friends—"It is strange how quickly these Italians



will pick up good manners if you only treat them properly, and are a little sharp with them."

The servants, too, with whom Antonio associated used at first to laugh at his odd words and ways. The laughter was generally good-natured, but still it hurt him, and drove him more and more in upon himself. Only once in all these four years had his heart warmed towards any one. It was a plump, flaxen-haired housemaid, with blue eyes and rosy cheeks, who caught his eye and his fancy, and she seemed pleased with the attentions of the dark-eyed youth.

One day, however, he heard her say to the cook, who was teasing her about him, "Do you think I would marry an Italian Papist! Thank you, miss, I'm good enough for his betters, any day in the year!"

The words were spoken in jest, but Antonio gave her no chance of explaining or retracting them. It was clear he had nothing in common with the people among whom he was condemned to live.

In spite of his reserve, he was not disliked by his fellow-servants, for he had soon perceived that their ill-will could make his position very unpleasant, and he had no aversion to work. But both their company and their manners were often irksome to him, and he longed to be entirely independent—while, on the other hand, he had acquired habits which he knew unfitted him for such a life as that which he had once led. For a long time he depended upon the promises which Mr. Williams had made to his father, though he never thought of reminding his master of them. As soon as he was convinced that there was no chance of their being fulfilled he began to consider the ways of life that still remained open to him.

About this time, while accompanying his master on a trip to the Continent, he made the acquaintance of a German courier, who took a fancy to the youth,

and something like an intimacy sprang up between them. Antonio even laid aside his habitual reserve so far as to inform his companion that, though he was entirely satisfied with the service he was in at present, he wished, in a year or two, to change his mode of life altogether, and made some inquiries into the nature and duties of his friend's office. The German good-naturedly gave him all the information he required. Many of the most important qualifications Antonio already possessed, and the rest he believed he could acquire without any great difficulty. From that moment he made up his mind to become a courier, and it was in pursuance of this plan that he had now given his master notice of his intention to return to Naples. He knew very well that years must pass before he would be fitted by his personal appearance to undertake the responsibilities of the post he desired ; but he had already saved what, for him, was no inconsiderable sum, and he wished to spend it in forming new connections and extending his knowledge of the Continent.

Mr. Williams's ill-humour did not last long. Though he did not retain by any means so lively a recollection of the boy's early devotion as his servant did, he had not entirely forgotten it. Since then he had been faithfully served, and, on reflection, he could not deny that, if Antonio's father really wanted him, the youth was right in thinking his the prior claim. Indeed, it seemed to be so obviously to Antonio's advantage to remain in his present position that Mr. Williams began to respect him for the resolution which he regretted, and which he now considered an act of generous self-sacrifice. He, consequently, not only resolved to make his valet a liberal present at parting, but warmly recommended him to one of his acquaintances, a Mr. Barclay, who was about to travel on the Continent for the first time, and therefore wished to engage a servant who could speak French and Italian.



It was finally arranged that Antonio should accompany his new master on his tour through France and Italy, as far as Naples, and remain in his service as long as he continued to reside in that city. Afterwards he was to be free, either to return with him to England, or to stay in his native place, and Mr. Williams warmly assured him that, if he made the former choice, he should be immediately installed in his old position.

Antonio soon gained the confidence of Mr. Barclay, for whom he performed many of the offices of courier and *valet-de-place*, as well as those of a body-servant. He had already stocked his mind with such information as guide-books afford with respect to the principal places in the two countries through which their route lay, and he spent all his free time in verifying the facts he had learnt by heart and adding to their number. They were to be his future stock-in-trade, and he prized them on that account, not for any other reason, and never weighted his mind with any such unprofitable lumber as the connection between them. The names of the principal hotels and the date at which the cathedral was built, the chief pictures in the gallery of a city and the number of its inhabitants, were all so many items which lay side by side in his head, and possessed about the same value.

Now Mr. Barclay started on his travels with the distinct resolution of improving his mind, and, as he was mentally indolent, though energetic in action, he found it easier to do so by conversing with his servant than by ascertaining the facts for himself. He was amazed at the extent of Antonio's information, and, having during the first few weeks convinced himself of its accuracy by constant appeals to his Murray, he abandoned himself entirely to his servant's direction. Thus a kind of companionship was established between master and man. They did the



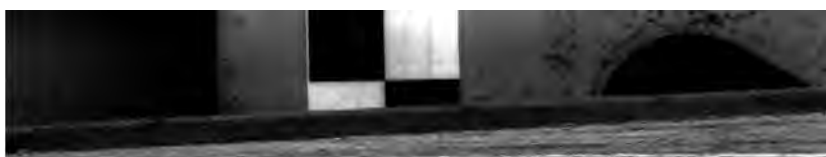
210 STORIES OF NAPLES AND THE CAMORRA

principal sights on their road together, and, as the latter never forgot his proper place, the English traveller concluded that he had found a treasure.

Mr. Barclay had far more feeling for the beauties of nature than for those of art, and when he arrived in Naples he was so charmed with the situation of the city that he resolved to remain there some months at least. He consequently took a set of rooms in a villa not far from the *trattoria* of Antonio's father, where he regularly dined, and bought a small sailing boat, and hired a sailor to take charge of it. During the first twenty-four hours of his stay he came to two conclusions with respect to the population, which he never afterwards modified. These were, firstly, that every Neapolitan, with the exception of Antonio—who had enjoyed the advantages of an English education—is a thief; and secondly, that it is the Catholic Church which has made him one. At first he was rather inclined to make a further exception in favour of the father, who treated him with the most flattering consideration, and was fond of poking a joke at the priests, but, on reflection, he made up his mind that it was only the influence of the son which held the nefarious proclivities of the old gentleman in check, in as far, at least, as his master was concerned. The traveller, of course, took no pains to conceal from his servant the bad opinion he had formed of the morals of the city.

Antonio tried once or twice to say a few words in defence of his countrymen, but he soon found that they had no weight, and concluded that it would be wisest for him to assume the mask of one whose innocence was no match for the guile that surrounded him.

Though Mr. Barclay had so great a contempt for the Neapolitans, he desired to make a good appearance before them, particularly when he took to the water of an evening. He accordingly had his boat



done up in the most elegant style, and though, by the influence of Antonio's father, he succeeded in having the work done for little more than half of what it would have cost in England, he was, of course, convinced that he had been overreached in every single particular of the transaction.

On the very evening on which he took his first sail his boatman informed him that the Camorra demanded a certain sum as dues for the boat.

"What advantage am I to obtain by paying?" asked the Englishman.

"The yacht will be safe, your Excellency."

"And what do I pay you for?" was the angry answer.

As soon as Antonio was told of the matter, he said all that he dared to induce his master to give way on this point, and his father was even more urgent in his advice and entreaties. But it was all in vain.

"It is not that I mind the money," Mr. Barclay said privately to his servant. "You know I have spent far more than I do here in many places; but I hate to be imposed upon, and I am resolved that I will not assist in demoralising the inhabitants of any of the countries that I visit. It is a matter of conscience with me."

From that day forth the boat was a constant source of annoyance and irritation. The man in charge could not go ashore for half an hour to get his dinner, buy a cigar, or drink a glass of wine, but he found on his return that everything on board had been thrown into disorder. No damage that could be estimated at a high pecuniary value was done, and nothing was stolen, but rotten fish were placed in the locker, the rigging was thrown out of gear, and the seats were dirtied over with the most admirable care. One day the rudder was missing, and it was only after a new one had been ordered that it was found, fastened securely beneath the keel of the boat. On another,



212 STORIES OF NAPLES AND THE CAMORRA

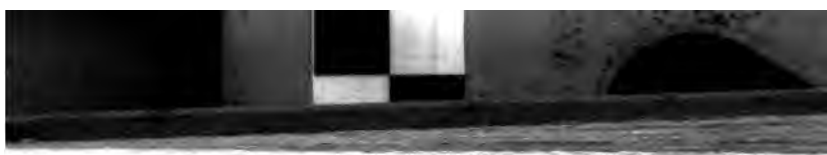
when the owner was just going on board his little craft, a ragged fisher-boy brought the soaking cushions and declared he had found them floating about while he was bathing, and was told they belonged to his Excellency.

Mr. Barclay was indignant and defiant. He dismissed his boatman, but in three days' time he was glad to re-engage him, as not a single seaman could be found to take his place, though double and even treble the original wages were offered. When, after their reconciliation, they pushed off together to the boat, which was anchored at a short distance from the shore, they found that it had been filled with filth and garbage of every kind.

Antonio thought that his master had been wrong in the whole matter, and he had no great personal affection for him, but he did not like to see him imposed upon, and he would have felt it a personal humiliation if his employer had given way now that war had been declared. Besides this, Mr. Barclay might be of important use to him, and he believed that, if he helped him in this emergency, he should secure his goodwill for ever. He accordingly revolved a plan of defence, which succeeded so admirably that he caught an urchin of about eleven in the very act of scouring the seats with a lobster in an advanced stage of putrefaction. Having secured his naked prisoner, he proceeded to inflict condign punishment upon him by giving him a severe whipping with a bunch of knotted cords which he had brought with him for the purpose. The victim screamed as if he were being murdered, but this only delighted the executioner.

"If we serve half-a-dozen of them in that way," he said to his master on his return, "we shall frighten the rest out of their mischief."

Mr. Barclay was delighted by the first sweet morsel of vengeance.



Antonio had been prepared for reprisals, but he certainly was not prepared for the form they took. On the following day he was arrested on a charge of assault, brought before a court, and condemned to fourteen days' imprisonment.

Mr. Barclay's fury knew no bounds, but it took a form which was entirely to the advantage of Antonio. Having asked to speak to his servant on private business, he placed a considerable sum of money in his hands, and assured him he would do everything in his power to alleviate his imprisonment. He found, on inquiry, that those who were confined on minor charges were allowed to receive their food from without the walls, if anybody could be found to send it them, and that no objection was made to their smoking. That was a good thing, and he made the fullest use of it, by ordering one of the chief restaurants of the city to send two luxurious meals a day to Antonio's new address, and by carrying two cases of the choicest cigars to the prison doors for his use. On this occasion, I am afraid, he forgot his principles so far as to slip several gold pieces into the gaoler's hand.

The discipline to which Antonio was subjected was not severe. In fact, he was allowed to loiter about and do exactly as he liked, and the only inconvenience to which he was subjected arose from the extreme dirt of the place and its inhabitants. In summer this would have rendered them almost intolerable to any one accustomed to the cleanliness of the north; but it was late in November now, and the weather was cool and pleasant. He knew, too, that complaints were useless, and that they would only render him disagreeable to the authorities and those with whom he must associate for a time. So, having done all in his power to make the best of a rather unpleasant situation, he abandoned himself to the only study that had ever really interested him—that of human character.

few weeks' imprisonment on some of importance, and, his informant at general opinion that they had no offence in question for the purpose of mittance to the place in which they were fined and assuring themselves that society were strictly observed within

Antonio bore no enmity to the punishment they had inflicted on taken part in an open war against had outwitted him. The blow, an estimate of honour, had been a point. More than this, he had no wish to go to extremes. It had always been his policy to make his peace with a body whose interests as soon as Mr. Barclay left Naples might be a favourable opportunity to advance, and his curiosity was excited by the three. He therefore took several of throwing himself in their way. He simply ignored his existence, and, when it became more pressing, one of them said, "What do you want?" in such a tone to him that all attempts at reconciliation were postponed till a more convenient



in such a place, yet he wished to gain the man's favour.

"I have, unfortunately, hardly anything with me here," he said, "but I will not forget you and your master when I leave."

The man bowed very respectfully and departed. He had scarcely gone out when the three entered, and quietly walked off with the cigars. The whole thing was done so much as a matter of course, and Antonio was so accustomed to repress his feelings, that he made no protest, and before he had recovered his presence of mind they were gone. He at once sought the turnkey and told him what had happened.

"They always play jokes of that kind on new comers," the man answered; "you had better make no noise about it, or you may get into trouble."

The acquaintance who had first informed him of the true character of the three gave him similar advice.

"If every cigar had been a ducat," he said, "I would not raise a finger against any of those men to have them all."

Antonio pondered these things over in his mind while his oppressors walked up and down before him in the full enjoyment of an afternoon cigar, and he concluded that submission might be the best policy.

He had had no lunch that day, and his spirits rose considerably when, at seven, he was again summoned to the little room, to find a sumptuous dinner spread upon the table. For the first time he blessed Mr. Barclay, with a heart that was all the fuller because the stomach was so empty. He had hardly taken his place, however, before the fatal three entered, pushed him from his chair, seated themselves at table, and made short work of the delicious meal.

When they had finished, one of them threw a small loaf of coarse bread towards him, and said, "There's some supper if you are hungry," and then both he and his companions rose and left the room.

Antonio's reflections were not of the easiest description as he munched his scanty crust, nor did they grow pleasanter in the long hours during which he tossed sleeplessly on his bed. It was evident that all the lower authorities of the place, as well as the prisoners, were either in league with, or under awe of, these agents of the Camorra, and for a fortnight he was entirely in their power. Open resistance was madness, and yet what was he to do? He had during the last few years grown so used to plentiful and comparatively dainty living that a course of bread and water seemed little better than absolute starvation to him. He could, doubtless, with the turnkey's help, purchase other provisions with the money which was still safe in his pocket; but there was every reason to believe that they would go the same way as those which his master had sent him. Should he try to bribe his tyrants? They would find it easier to rob him of his money than to make any concessions for the sake of it. He could come to no resolution.

He rose, and the hours passed wearily by. One o'clock came at length, however, and the turnkey politely informed him that his lunch had arrived and was waiting for him. As soon as he had seated himself the three, as he had expected, appeared. He himself never knew what passed in his mind at the moment. At times he was inclined to think that his action was the result of a resolution to which he had unconsciously come in the course of his long brooding. At times he fancied he was prompted by his hunger only. My own opinion is that he was, for once in his life, the victim of one of those wild fits of unreasoning rage (*collera*) to which most Neapolitans are subject. Be this as it may, the door had hardly closed behind his persecutors when he felled the first to the ground by a well-directed blow on the mouth, and doubled up the second with another of equal force in the stomach. He then turned upon the



third, who was unclasping a long knife, seized him by the throat, wrenched his weapon from him, and hurled him into a corner. The three rose, shook themselves, cast questioning glances at one another, and then slunk away.

Antonio sank upon his chair, exhausted by the excitement rather than the physical exertion. His whole body trembled, the room whirled and staggered before his eyes. But he knew he must not give way. He poured out half a glass of wine with an unsteady hand, and drank it rapidly. That recalled his faculties. The die was cast now; whatever the consequences were, he must brave them out. His hunger was quite gone, but he must eat his lunch to show he was not afraid. After a mouthful or two his appetite returned, and he ate heartily. In half an hour, when the turnkey entered to take away the things, he had finished his meal and made up his mind.

"Will you be kind enough," he said, "to go to the gentlemen who were here a short time ago, and tell them I shall feel obliged if they will send me a cigar?"

The man at once obeyed, and returned in two or three minutes with the article desired.

Antonio lighted it and strolled carelessly into the court. Everything was quiet there. It was evident that no report of his adventure had got abroad, or the men would have been discussing it in groups, or, if that had been forbidden, they would have shrunk from him in fear, or at least eyed him with curiosity. Did the three wish to conceal the check they had received, in order that the awe which they inspired might not be diminished? If so, it might be possible to come to terms with them. But it was clear the advances must come from their side.

He had hardly finished his cigar when the turnkey told him that the gentlemen who had dined with him yesterday evening would be glad if he would drink a glass of wine with them in the dining-room. He at



218 STORIES OF NAPLES AND THE CAMORRA

once accepted the invitation. Escape, he knew, was impossible, and he had come to the conclusion that it was improbable that any attempt would be made upon his life while he was in prison. His enemies probably knew that his master was not a man who would be likely to allow an affair of that kind to be hushed up. As soon as he was released he would be in constant danger, of course. The wisest thing, after all, would be to return to England with Mr. Barclay.

His late opponents received him with the greatest politeness. One of them filled a glass with wine, and, presenting it to him, said :—

“As you sent for a cigar, we thought you might perhaps like to have the rest in your own keeping. There they are !” And he pointed to the two boxes, which stood upon the table.

“Well, perhaps it would be more convenient if each kept his own share. Let us divide them.” His tone was that of a man who confers, not one who asks, a favour.

“Pray be seated.” Antonio sat down.

What passed at that interview was never known to any but those who took part in it. But, from that day forth, Antonio became the inseparable companion of his former persecutors, and he shared all the advantages which they enjoyed. Not only was he freer from molestation of every kind ; his fellow-prisoners behaved to him as if they were his subjects, and his gaolers as if they were his servants. Every one in the house knew that he had been admitted into the service of the Camorra.

When the term of Antonio's service was expired, Mr. Barclay sent a carriage to fetch him from prison, and awaited him with the utmost impatience, in his own room. He had not only missed Antonio's services greatly, but he felt that he had been suffering for his sake. His reception of his servant was therefore so cordial that it could hardly be called con-



descending. After a very friendly greeting he informed him that he desired to get out of that nest of thieves as soon as possible, and had made every arrangement for his departure. He had sold his boat for a third of its original cost, and intended to start in two days' time. "Indeed, I should have left a week ago," he added, "but I wanted to give you a chance of returning with me."

Antonio was all gratitude and devotion. Nothing would afford him personally greater pleasure than to attend Mr. Barclay to the end of the world, unless perhaps it were to re-enter the service of Mr. Williams, to whom he owed everything. But he could not do anything in direct opposition to his father's will. Would Mr. Barclay allow him to go and talk the matter over with the old man?

Consent was, of course, at once given.

When his master appeared to dine in the *trattoria*, he found that Antonio's face wore an expression of the blankest despondency, and the usually deferential father was perfectly deaf to all his arguments. His son was old enough to act independently, he said, and he had no means of compelling his obedience; but, if he valued his blessing, or, indeed, wished to avoid his curse, he would never go abroad again. Here he put the plates down on the table with something like a bang. He had toiled for his boy, and loved him, he continued, and, if he received no love in return, he did not think it was his fault. He was growing old, and needed some one to take a little care of him now; but it was true he could not give his son such good clothes and food as his foreign masters, and he might, of course, cling to them if he liked.

Antonio here embraced his father, and led him away.

The Englishman was quite touched by this little comedy, which father and son had arranged together half an hour before, and he made no further attempt



220 STORIES OF NAPLES AND THE CAMORRA

to induce his servant to return with him to England. On taking leave of him, however, he said, "I am sorry to leave you in this sink of iniquity, though I know your honesty is above temptation. Remember you will always have faithful friends in Mr. Williams and myself."

"One can only do one's duty, and must leave the rest," replied the youth, with a look which expressed his thanks more eloquently than any words could have done.

The history of Don Antonio's later life is veiled in mystery. During the next two years he frequently acted as a guide to parties who were desirous of making excursions in the neighbourhood of his native city, and he once accompanied an English family, whose courier had been taken ill in Naples, as far as Turin. On all these occasions he seems to have given entire satisfaction. Meanwhile, his relations with the Camorra still continued, though at first he occupied a post of no great responsibility, and during the political changes of the next few years his tact and knowledge were of the greatest use to his employers; indeed, he must have rendered them some signal service, as he was suddenly admitted to the fullest confidence they ever granted to a subordinate. It was about this time that he finally abandoned his design of becoming a courier, and accepted a position offered him by a commercial house of some standing. According to the arrangements then made, he undertook to translate the French and English correspondence of the firm in consideration of a small monthly salary; but he stipulated that this work should be done in his own room. Since then this clerkship had formed his ostensible means of earning a livelihood, and the duties it imposed had not been severe. What position he now really occupies in the Camorra none but the highest members of that body know. It is probably one of his duties to communicate between them and the *Capi Paranze*, but, for



the common people of Naples, he is the living embodiment of that mysterious power which some of them love, many of them fear, and all obey, and it is a proof of his extraordinary address that, though the police are well aware of this fact, and have been watching him closely for the last ten years, they have never been able to frame even a plausible charge against him.

V

IT is now half-past six o'clock in the evening, and the streets are thronged with people, but the brilliant and deserted water-stall which we noticed in the morning is closed. Its mistress is seated at the door of the house in which she lives, in one of the narrow streets close by ; her hands are folded in her lap, and there is an expression of deep despondency, almost of hopelessness, in the pinched face. The neighbours are clustered around the other street-doors, but none of them take any notice of her, except an impish child, who now and then runs up to within a few yards, and there utters the most genuine Neapolitan imprecations in as close an imitation as he can of the dialect of Bologna. She hardly remarks him, however ; she is too busy with her thoughts ; and, as you can see by the way her eyes turn every now and then up the street, she is expecting some one to pass. She has not long to wait before Don Antonio comes by, when she rises, and beckons him to follow her into the house, which he at once does.

"How much does it make?" she asks in a low voice, as soon as the door is closed.

Don Antonio takes a note-book from his pocket, and turns its pages. If you could examine them you would find nothing there but an account of small

personal expenses. The figures, however, have quite a different meaning for him.

"Twenty-three lire, thirty centesimi," he answers.

"How am I to pay twenty-three lire?" she says, in a tone quite as much of inward as outward questioning.

"Why did you incur the fine?" rejoins Don Antonio.

"But you see I cannot pay it," she replies, as her eyes wander over the room, which is bare and poverty-stricken, though scrupulously neat and clean. "What good will it do you if you ruin me?"

"It will teach others not to follow your example."

"But, if I submit now, and do what I can?"

"The fine must be paid; to remit any part would be to encourage obstinacy."

"Then I must close the stall, and sell my things, and beg my way from door to door."

"You should have thought of that nine months ago——"

"But now—that is past—have you no pity? Have I worked hard all my life, only to come to this?"

Don Antonio is silent for nearly half a minute.

"Will you undertake to pay the fine by instalments, as well as the regular dues?" he then asks.

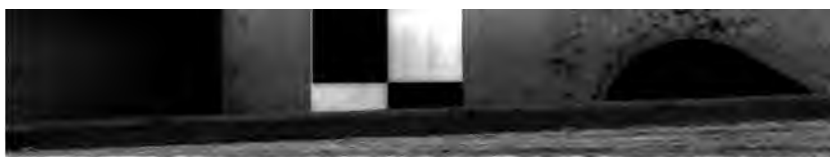
"Yes, as far as my utmost power goes."

"Well, then, perhaps Don Giacomo will lend you the money—that is, pay it to me for you; but you will have to sign a paper acknowledging that you have borrowed the money from him, and promising to pay—let me see—half a lira a week. Are you content with the arrangement?"

"I must be," replies the woman, in a tone half of resignation, and half of relief.

"Then it is time to be going."

As the two pass down the street together the neighbours nod and whisper to each other. They know the proud spirit has at last been broken, and



their sympathies are all on the side of the conqueror. When the water-stall is reached, Don Antonio waits before it till it is opened, and then receives a glass of lemon-water.

"Keep up a good heart," he says, as he pays his soldo, "I think you will have better luck in future," and he leaves the square with a friendly nod to the proprietor of the rival establishment, who has viewed the scene with an expression of supreme disgust, as he knows that henceforth the widow will have her share of whatever custom may be going.

When Don Antonio reaches Santa Lucia, he finds the fishermen awaiting him in the best of humours, as they have received not only a full equivalent in kind for the fish that was stolen, but also a list of places at which they have been able to dispose of their wares quickly, and to great advantage. It was in carrying orders with respect to this part of the business that Peppiniello had been employed in the earlier part of the day, and there were several names on the list which neither you nor he would be likely to suspect of any connection with the Camorra. The whole bearing of the men is expressive of gratitude and admiration, but their leader seems, by his manner, to be a little ill at ease. When Don Antonio is about to step into the boat, he says :—

"Don Giacomo has asked us to take him as far as Procida ; shall we wait for him ?"

"Certainly."

"And in which boat shall we put him ?"

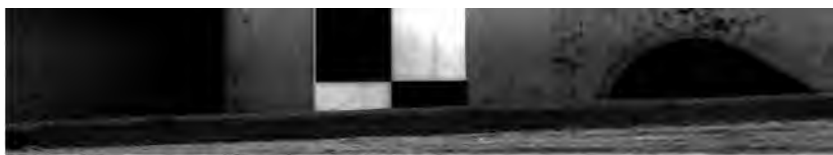
"In your own."

The man's face clears at once, and he places his own and his brother's overcoat on the stern seats to render the guests he honours as comfortable as possible.

He has scarcely finished, when a portly and well-dressed Neapolitan tradesman appears, followed by a ragged boy, who carries a highly-coloured carpet-bag.

It is Don Giacomo, one of the most popular men of his class in the whole town. He has a kind word and a joke for every one, and people say that he is inclined at times to pay small services with these instead of copper ; but, if so, it seems that there must be a demand for such wares in Naples, as no one is more readily served than he. He is perhaps the greatest master now living of the form of comic representation which is peculiar to Naples, and which, beginning in simple, almost realistic, mimicry, passes by imperceptible transitions into the wildest caricature, and bounds from prose into verse and song, and then back again into simple dialogue. Of late, however, he has been somewhat chary in exhibiting his talent, and it is only when he is in a peculiarly festive humour, and among his most intimate friends, that he will consent to do so. He doubtless feels that a man who has passed his fiftieth birthday ought to possess, or at least assume, a more serious frame of mind, and it may be that similar reflections have induced him to go more regularly to church, and to invite his parish priest more frequently to dinner, than he used to do. As he has got on well in this world, it is natural that he should desire to secure himself as fair a start as possible in the next. He still, however, distinctly prefers the feasts to the fasts of the calendar. It would be a wonder if he ever forgot a saint's day which afforded a religious sanction for good eating, drinking, and society, whereas it must be confessed that his memory is a little treacherous with respect to vigils and Fridays. In such cases, however, he duly repents of his irregularities as often as he recalls them to mind, and makes good resolutions as to the future, and what more can be expected of an elderly gentleman in a prosperous way of business?

For Don Giacomo has prospered ever since he began life as a kitchen-boy in a little Neapolitan tavern, and now he is the proprietor of two *trattorie*, a



tobacco shop, and a considerable *deposito di vino*. If you intend to stay long in Naples, you will do well to take your wines from him, as it is his pride never to sell a bad or falsified article, and few men can rival him in his judgment as to the adjacent vineyards and their vintages. What you pay will, of course, depend on his knowledge of your means, and your knowledge of the market prices, for he is a man of the old school, who loves bargaining for its own sake, and holds fixed prices in unutterable contempt as the latest attempt of born fools to place themselves on an equality with men of sense, an absurd piece of impudence which is evidently quite contrary to the will of Heaven. His business is large, yet he manages it alone, and without the help of such new-fangled arts as reading or writing, which he has never been able to acquire. He has servants under him, of course, but none of them would venture to suggest an opinion on any question of purchase or sale, and he trusts his memory far more than their books, which he regards as a necessary expedient of weak minds. He is well served, however, for he has a good eye, chooses his servants carefully, and tests them well before he places them in positions of trust. His profits, too, are large ; yet he is not an unjust man. He pays his debts with the utmost regularity, and though, on engaging a clerk or servant, he will beat down his wages to the lowest possible point, he frequently, at the end of the year, makes him a present of far more than the difference between his original demand and the salary he has accepted, if he finds him really serviceable. A good workman of any kind, on entering his employment, could hardly do better than to say :—" I will take what you think it right to give me at the end of the week or month." Nor is this all. It not unfrequently happens that Don Giacomo disposes of a quantity of wine at a price considerably higher than that which he



226 STORIES OF NAPLES AND THE CAMORRA

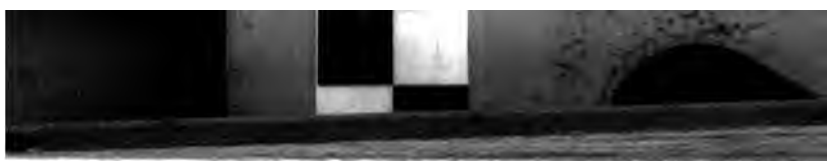
at first calculated on receiving, and in such cases he invariably sends to the peasant from whom he bought it a sum proportionate to his own profits.

He is generous, too, and many a poor woman whom he has helped in her need has wondered why the saints have not heard the prayers of so good a man and granted him children. Yet he is very close in his reckonings, and will haggle for half an hour, even when his time is precious, over a halfpenny. To-night he is in a joyous mood, and, as he wishes to display his parsimony, he gives the bearer of his carpet-bag only a penny. The boy, who knows he will be no loser in the end, accepts it without a word, touches his cap with a smile, and goes his way, while Don Giacomo seats himself beside Don Antonio.

At first the conversation between the two is quite general, and it is frequently interrupted by a loud jest with the fishermen, but soon the voices are lowered and become more earnest as business matters of importance are discussed. Different as the men are, they not only share important interests and secrets, but have a strong liking for, and great confidence in, each other, though, when they meet in the presence of third persons, their behaviour is that of distant acquaintances. It is only on occasions like the present, when they are safe from the observation of all except those whom they know they can trust, that their manner becomes really cordial. After a number of affairs like that of the mistress of the water-stall have been settled, Don Giacomo leans back in his seat, and says, in the tone of one who reverts to lighter subjects after a serious discussion :—

“Well, I have seen the boy you spoke of, and I think he will do.”

“Then we have only the details to arrange.”



"Which are always the most important things. What do you propose?"

"That you shall take him into your service, and set him to any work you find him best fitted for—in a word, if he does well, give him a start in life."

"Well."

"At first you will give him his lunch—a piece of bread and a sup of wine will do—and seventy-five centesimi a day."

"Seventy-five centesimi for a little ragamuffin of thirteen! Oh, I understand, his friends are ready to pay that for his board and instruction; very well."

Don Antonio's whole face lights up with a smile, as he says:—"My dear fellow, I don't ask you to take Peppiniello as a good business investment, but as a personal favour to me."

"True, true," replies the other, relenting a little, "that alters the case. If it were only half a lira I should not so much mind, but seventy-five centesimi!"

"Let it be half a lira, then; I will pay the other five soldi myself, but you must give them him, and he must not know they come from me."

It is now Don Giacomo's turn to laugh, and he does so heartily; the idea that his friend, whose straitened means he so often regrets, should contribute to the support of one of his servants is so obviously absurd. But his sense of humour soon gives way to curiosity, and he asks suddenly, with a shrewd glance:—"Why are you so much interested in the boy?"

"He has been of the greatest service to me; I have tried him, and found him faithful."

"Then," rejoins the other, in a perfectly frank tone, "I will do whatever I can for him—whatever you think right. But how if I were to take him entirely

into my house? I would lodge, feed, and clothe him well. You'll be surprised to see how soon the little skeleton will get a comfortable coating of flesh, and on Sundays and saints' days—well, I dare say there may be a soldo forthcoming now and then. Won't that be better than leaving him to fend for himself?"

"It would, doubtless, if no one were dependent upon him."

"Dependent upon him? What do you mean?"

Don Antonio tells the story of Peppiniello's life.

His companion's heart is touched. "I will go and see the poor children, and get them out of that wretched hole to-morrow," he exclaims.

"No, that is just what you must not do. They have been there so long that a month or two longer will do them no harm, and the boy must not think that he has got into a new life, in which he has nothing to do but enjoy himself. He must still feel he has only himself to rely upon, and that he has to earn all he gets. That's the way you became what you are, Don Giacomo, and, believe me, it's the only way to make a true man."

"Well, well, perhaps you are right. I will do nothing without consulting you. Send me the boy as soon as you like."

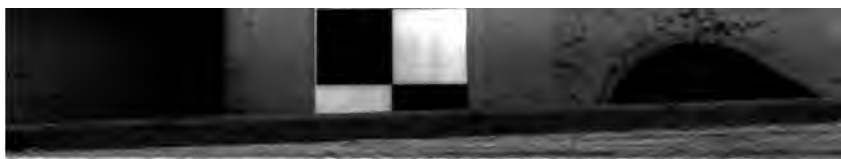
"I may at times want him to take a message for me; it will not be often."

"He will always be at your service, as indeed I am, and all that belongs to me."

The boat touches the land, and, as Don Antonio springs out of it, he whispers to the head-fisherman, who offers his assistance:—

"The next time you bring any of Francesco's fish to market, you had better set a watch on them, for I will not be responsible."

The man is too much taken aback to find an immediate answer, and before he is ready with an excuse



DON ANTONIO

229

it is too late, for his accuser has half climbed the steps which lead to the high road.

As Don Antonio turns his steps homewards, he can hear his friend striking up a merry song on the way. He walks slowly, with his head sunk upon his breast, as if in deep thought. The voice dies away in the distance, and the shadows of night have closed round him before he enters the city.



DOMENICO

I

YOU may perhaps remember that, when we followed Don Antonio through the town, he had a rather unpleasant meeting with another Camorrist, who had been concerned in the theft of a basket of fish from the crew of a boat that had paid duty to the Camorra. The thief, whose name was Domenico, then submitted abjectly to his superior, and made the restitution required of him. He could not well do otherwise, for he knew that, if his opponent chose, it would be easy for him either to have him put out of the way in the due course of law, or stabbed without any such troublesome formalities. A conviction of this kind is better calculated to insure obedience than to serve as the basis of a very warm or disinterested friendship, and it must be confessed that Domenico did not feel any very passionate attachment to Don Antonio. He would not have been disconsolate if he had heard that his commanding officer had been sent to prison, and he would have been conscious of a certain relief if he had been informed on trustworthy authority that he was dead.

These sentiments were by no means of recent growth. Domenico was an older man than Don Antonio, and he had served the Camorra longer; indeed, he might almost be said to belong to it by



birth and breeding. He had never had any profession but that of a Camorrista, and yet this intruder was placed over him, and allowed to order him about and thwart his plans. He felt nothing but devotion to that higher body whose agent and mouthpiece his enemy was, for he had never been brought into direct contact with its members, who were even more anxious to conceal their power than he was to display his. They never came in his way, but their agent did, and Domenico often fancied that, but for his influence, their rule would be exercised in a way entirely in accordance with his own wishes, and that he should only become conscious of it when it was exerted to protect him from punishment, or to render his occasional visits to prison as short and little irksome as possible.

From his own point of view it must be allowed that there was some cause for his jealousy. He could never, it is true, have filled the position which Don Antonio occupied, for he was wanting in all the gifts of mind and character which rendered his rival invaluable to his employers; but he had not intelligence enough to perceive this, and in all the qualities most highly esteemed among the great popular army of the association, which alone he knew, he was greatly the superior; he was stronger, fiercer, and more reckless, readier with his knife, and at least as well provided with the resources furnished by the lower form of cunning. Besides this, he was well acquainted with the inside of almost every gaol in the city, and on the day when first we met him he had just returned from a lengthened stay in Ponza, where he had been residing in the so-called *domicilio coatto*, that is to say, under the supervision of the police. He had in reality no great objection to the terms of more or less strict confinement to which he had been so frequently condemned, for he had a habit of making himself at home wherever he happened to be, and he often found



232 STORIES OF NAPLES AND THE CAMORRA

it possible to exercise his authority even more capriciously and despotically when in prison than when he was at large : but, in his fits of ill-humour, he was fond of comparing his "sufferings" for the Camorra with the comparatively safe and easy life led by Don Antonio. For these and many other reasons he was convinced that he had a just cause of complaint, and Domenico was not accustomed either to repress his feelings or to give them expression only in words.

From his childhood his life had been wild, passionate and lawless. He was the third son of Donna Anastasia, the wife of Don Carlo, who kept a small *taverna* in the Vicaria ; but the general opinion of the neighbourhood was that his real father was a Camorrist who was known by the nickname of Il Turco, and who was the dread and admiration of all the district. Strange tales were told of the savage vengeance which "the Turk" had taken on his enemies, of his unbounded devotion to his friends, of his greed of money and of pleasure, and of his sudden fits of capricious and unreasoning generosity. He was a man of an exceedingly powerful frame, and there was an uncanny charm about his face and manner which few women of his class found it possible to resist. Anastasia was below the middle height, but with well-formed and perfectly rounded limbs. The features were irregular, and her liquid, black eyes generally wore an expression of somewhat indolent content, though they would brighten into fire in a moment at any merry jest, or at the slightest thing that excited her anger. In fact she was far less indolent than she seemed. She was fond of being caressed with soft words and fed with sweetmeats, and at such times her ways were meek and still as those of a kitten, basking in the sunshine ; but her moods were changeful, and in her fits of rage she seemed conscious of nothing but the feeling of the



moment and an almost physical craving to satisfy it. At such times her whole appearance altered, and the face, which usually appeared as empty of thought and emotion as a doll's, suddenly gained an awful expressiveness. Once, when a neighbour had provoked her, she had snatched the infant from her arms, and was about to dash it under the wheels of a passing carriage, when a word and look from Il Turco quelled her. She returned the child gently to its mother, and then shrank shuddering into a corner. It was the first time she had ever seen the man, but from that moment she was his slave. In her girlhood she had been addicted to fits of mirth as unreasoning as her anger. In the nights of July and August, when the heat of the summer had entered their blood, she and a few of her companions are said to have met frequently with their tambourines in a large empty room in the house of one of them, and there to have danced in their nightdresses, with bare feet and loosened hair, until they sank to the ground, one after another, utterly exhausted by their exertions. On the following day it had been her delight to lie with her head covered, but her body exposed to the full glare of the sun, until the heat became intolerable, and then to sprinkle herself with water. Such excesses, of course, ceased with her marriage ; but the passions which prompted them still remained unconquered.

Don Carlo hated Domenico from his birth, and his feelings towards his wife from that time seemed to be usually of a similar character, though he was subject to fits of fondness for her every now and then, which she knew how to excite and to use. Towards the boy he never felt or showed anything but aversion ; yet his dread of Il Turco was so great that he never dared to ill-treat either the mother or the son, that is to say, openly ; he had invented a thousand little ways of hurting and annoying them, and his chief amusement when he sat alone was to ponder over a

new one. During the first few months of the baby's life it had been his pleasure secretly to pull out one of the pins with which its swaddling clothes were fastened, and to re-adjust it in such a way that it must scratch the child. When it screamed he would curse and call to the mother to silence it, and, when the cause of its crying was discovered, and the girl who had to take care of it scolded, he would go into a corner and laugh silently and rub his hands; for he knew she had been recommended by Il Turco, and that her real office was to report on the conduct of his wife. The rest of his tricks displayed about the same amount of courage and ingenuity, and the feelings they awakened in Domenico may be easily imagined.

Anastasia, on the other hand, did everything in her power to pet and spoil the child. She had never shown any great affection for his elder brothers, but she doted upon him. His slightest whim was a law to her, and consequently to the rest of the house; his wishes were forestalled and his appetites pampered. In this labour of love she was ably seconded by most of the regular guests, who soon discovered that the easiest and surest way to get into the good graces of Il Turco was to pay attention to the boy.

Don Carlo's elder sons, on the other hand, sided with their father, and they had innumerable opportunities of disturbing Domenico's peace. As they were in strict alliance with their father and each other, it was easy for them to lay the blame of all their own faults upon Domenico, and it was owing to their united testimony that, at a very tender age, he obtained the credit of being a consummate liar, a character which, as his intelligence developed, he endeavoured, not unsuccessfully, to maintain. Besides this, they led him into scrapes, stole his sweetmeats, and broke his playthings; but they rarely ventured to inflict any personal chastisement upon him, for the



boys were held in check by the same power that awed their father. Il Turco had once caught them in the very act of tormenting the child, and given them such a beating as neither of them ever forgot, under the very eyes of their father. When he had finished he told Domenico, before all three, that he would repeat the whipping whenever he complained to him, without listening to any excuses or making any further inquiries, and he repeated the promise once a year, whenever the boy's birthday came round. The use which Domenico made of the protection thus offered him was rather a strange one. He never gave information as to the ill-treatment to which he was really subjected, but every three or four months he would invent a story about his enemies, and, as Il Turco was as good as his word, he had then the satisfaction of seeing them suffer when they least expected it, and of feeling that their misfortunes were owing to his own will, not to any fault of theirs.

There was, however, by this time, another member of the family, who has not hitherto been mentioned. When Domenico was a little more than three years old, Anastasia gave birth to a daughter, and called her Margherita. Perhaps it was the unusual name that led people to suppose she was the child of a Hungarian officer who had left Naples some months before her birth. If they were right, Il Turco was too much a man of the world to show indignation at the infidelity of a woman for whom he had ceased to feel any passion, for he continued to haunt the house and watch over her and her son. It was his boast that he never deserted those who had once trusted him, and that all whom he protected were safe, but he did not pretend to take any interest in the little girl.

Don Carlo and his sons detested her from the first, and, as the mother viewed her with indifference and

she had no Camorrist to defend her, the child's life would have been one of uninterrupted misery, if Domenico had not conceived a strong affection for her. Why he did so nobody could make out, but he, who had never given a piece of any of the sweets with which he was so plentifully supplied to either of his brothers, and who had screamed, scratched, and bitten if they ventured to touch anything that belonged to him, would share everything with Margherita, and only laugh if she broke his toys. The child took to the only person in the house who showed any marked fondness for her, and as soon as she could walk she would toddle about after him wherever he went, and sit quietly beside him while he played. The mother after a time was gained over.

"If you love me, you must love Margherita too," Domenico said; "you know she is my sister."

Anastasia smiled, but from that day she began, first to show, and then to feel, a greater affection for her daughter.

It was natural that a boy brought up as Domenico had been should early learn the value of money and feel a desire for a larger supply of it than his mother was able to provide. In his ninth year he hit upon a plan of procuring some, in which Margherita was of considerable use to him. He possessed a number of common prints representing the more popular saints. In the evening twilight the two children were accustomed to sally forth armed with one of these and two thin wax tapers. When they reached a suitable place, they fastened the picture to the wall and lighted the two candles before it. Then Margherita took a little tray, and asked every body who chanced to pass to give a *grano* to Sant' Antonio, San Gennaro, or whoever the patron they had chosen for the evening might be. The request was rarely refused, for there was something in the



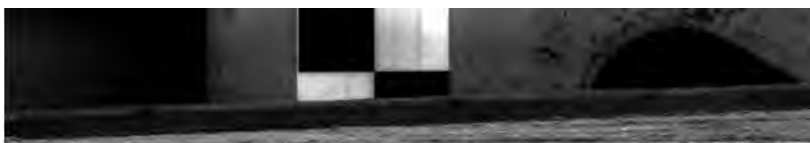
child's face and manner which struck strangers. When the lights had burnt out, Domenico pocketed the spoil, took down the print, and marched off with his sister. It frequently happened that other children endeavoured to beg on their own account. At first he had done his utmost to prevent this, but he soon found it was better to permit it, on condition of their paying him half their earnings. Thus, though he never begged himself, he derived what, for a child, was a considerable revenue from public charity.

In a few years, however, he found that his means were not equal to his wants, and when he was about thirteen he hit upon a new and more daring plan. He made advances to a number of boys who were two or three years older than himself, and, after having sworn them to secrecy, he communicated his scheme to them. This was nothing less than to form a secret association. They all eagerly grasped at the idea, and in a week or two he found himself at the head of a band of the most resolute youths of the vicinity and in a position to commence operations. On the next three evenings a large number of windows were broken, without any one being able to discover the culprits, and on the fourth morning Domenico called on a respectable tradesman. He was sorry, he said, to hear of the mischief which had lately been done, and he and some of his friends had resolved to put a stop to it, but, in order to do so, money was required. He had, however, made some arrangements already, and would undertake to insure the safety of any shop or house whose master engaged to pay a small weekly sum. The meaning of this was clear to the tradesman, and his first inclination was to place his visitor in the hands of the police; but he remembered that Il Turco had taken the boy under his protection, and, as the sum asked was small,

he thought it most prudent to pay it. Domenico called at several other houses that morning with equal success, and in the evening their windows remained uninjured, while those on each side were smashed. The matter was widely discussed, and the means by which their security had been obtained began to be whispered about. One householder after another found a means of offering the few *grani* that were demanded, and so in a short time blackmail was levied on the whole neighbourhood.

Meanwhile Margherita continued her evening occupation and excited an ever increasing spirit of pious charity among the higher classes, and especially among foreigners. Her form was slighter and less rounded than that of her mother, and no one would have called her face beautiful. But she had a look and manner that haunted you longer than the perfect faces of which you may now and then catch a glimpse on Monte Pincio at Rome, or in the Cascine at Florence. It seemed as if a soul were looking directly at you out of the wide, blue eyes, as if each of the movements of the slight frame had a direct spiritual significance ; but you felt at once that it was a soul on which an evil spell had fallen, that deprived it of its freedom and imprisoned it in base circumstances. Those who had only a casual acquaintance with Anastasia declared that there was absolutely no resemblance between her and her daughter, and it was necessary to place the two side by side before you could convince them that the shape of the mouth, the cut of the forehead and the lines of the eyebrows were exactly the same ; but no one who had ever seen the mother in a moment of intense emotion could doubt, or forget, the likeness she bore to the child.

In Margherita, however, it seemed as if all the more phlegmatic elements of the elder woman's character had disappeared. She had no periods of voluptuous indolence ; her face was never void of expression. As



soon as one emotion died out of it, another appeared, without leaving any neutral interval. When she knelt before the saint whose picture she fastened to the wall, you might have taken her at times for a youthful St. Theresa, at times for a childish Gretchen, who had been guilty, in some undreamed of way, of some unknown sin, for which she was imploring forgiveness. If you put a *carlino* on her tray her face would assume an expression of devout thankfulness, such as might have become a poor soul in purgatory for whom a pitying saint intercedes. There was nothing intentionally false in all this. She was really grateful to you for the little silver coin, and she sincerely implored the saint before whom she knelt to send her as many *grani* as might be. The strangest thing about it was that you never felt as if you were talking to a child when you spoke with her ; there was something about her that hushed and awed you ; and yet she never seemed to be a woman either. She was at this time hardly eleven years old, and bodily much less fully developed than many a Neapolitan girl of her age.

The only feelings of which she had at this time any experience were a passionate affection for her brother, and a no less strongly pronounced aversion to all the other members of the family. She simply disliked her mother, but she regarded Don Carlo and his elder sons with positive hatred. If they touched her, she would escape as quickly and quietly as she could, and wash the part they had desecrated as eagerly as if there had been infection in their fingers. But to Domenico she was all devotion ; to him alone she talked quite freely, and showed her whole nature. When the two children could manage to get into a room alone, she would act scenes, and tell stories she had invented, and keep the boy oscillating between tears and laughter for hours together, and then she would suddenly become serious, and throw her arms round his neck, and make him promise

he would never leave her. Once—but that was Domenico's proposal—they had pricked their arms, and let a drop or two of their blood fall into a glass of wine, and sworn never to part or marry as they drank it out. But Margherita had added, as she put down the empty goblet—"That is till after we are dead, you know," as if she felt that in that other life some one else might have higher claims upon her.

Margherita found no difficulty in enforcing her brother's rule as to the fifty per cent. which every one who begged by her candles was to pay. Since he had formed his secret association his name was generally respected, and no one ventured to dispute his orders. But then he shared the proceeds and everything else he possessed with her; only it was an understood thing that he was to bear the purse and decide how the money was to be spent. That was too natural an arrangement for the girl to have dreamt of disputing it, if she had felt any inclination to do so, which she did not.

Even Don Carlo and his sons were so impressed with the grandeur of the position which Domenico had made for himself that they were more careful as to how they interfered with him than heretofore. Perhaps that was the reason why they concentrated their spite upon Margherita, or perhaps they did so because they perceived that that was the safest and most effectual way of annoying their chief enemy, as they knew that neither Il Turco nor Domenico's associates would be likely to punish them on account of their treatment of a girl. For a long time they confined themselves to actions against which it was impossible for him to protest. They gave her hard or degrading work to do, and pulled her about, and kissed her in a way they knew she detested.

Domenico was furious, but he was powerless, and therefore kept silence. He felt sure that, some time or other, the day would come when he could take his



revenge. He himself was fifteen by this time, and his brothers were too old to be beaten by Il Turco—at least they thought so. Were they quite as safe as they imagined? They would see in time; at present he must wait.

Unfortunately his patience only excited their scorn, and Margherita was treated worse from day to day. She never complained, but kissed and tried to soothe him, and in fact they had never hitherto ventured on positive ill-treatment. Unfortunately, however, she one evening happened to pass through the public room where Don Carlo and his two sons were seated after the last of the guests were gone. They at once began to jeer and mock at her, and at length the youngest, who had been drinking more than usual, struck her a severe blow. This action dissipated the vague fear that had hitherto restrained them. They all fell upon the child and beat her violently; then they tore her clothes and kicked her, for they had lost all self-control. As soon as she escaped she crawled to the inner room in which Domenico was seated, threw herself at his feet, and hid her face on his knees. Her whole body was quivering with pain and shame and rage, and it was long before she could speak for sobbing. When she had told her tale, the boy sprang up and unclasped his knife, but she clung to his knees.

"Don't leave me, don't leave me," she sobbed, "you can do nothing against them now. But swear to me that you will never speak about it, and never forget it."

Domenico swore.

It was late before he fell asleep: indeed he did not do so till he had formed a plan of vengeance. Next morning he almost carried Margherita, who could hardly walk, to her godmother's, and bade her remain there till the evening. Afterwards he went to a distant part of the town where he was not likely to be known, and there bought a quantity of whip-cord.



242 STORIES OF NAPLES AND THE CAMORRA

He was back in time for lunch, which he ate without speaking a word. When he had finished he rose, and, turning to the three, he said : " You know what you did last night—you shall pay for it."

Their only answer was a contemptuous laugh, but, when the boy had left the room, they glanced questioningly at each other, as if they did not feel quite at ease. He had looked so awfully like *Il Turco* as he spoke—and yet, what could he do ?

The secret association for the protection of window-panes rented a small room in a neighbouring street, and thither Domenico now went, as he knew he could be alone there. On his way he bought a measure of wine, which he carried with him. As soon as he had entered the room he locked the door on the inside, and, taking the whip-cord from his pocket he knotted it, and formed it into a rough scourge. Then he stripped and began to beat himself ; he winced with the pain, but, though he exerted his utmost force, it did not seem to him as if he struck hard enough. He wanted to tear his flesh so that the wounds might bleed. He knew there were some nails in the table drawer ; he would fasten them into the knots. Yes, the whip bit more sharply now ; he had to bite his lips to prevent himself from crying out. At last he began to feel faint ; so he lay down and moaned and whimpered on the floor. But it was not for long ; in five minutes he got up, and, after taking a little wine, he began again. He did this four or five times, and when at last he stopped it was because he felt he could do no more rather than because he was satisfied he had done enough. It required an effort for him to put on his clothes and crawl home, and when he got there he lay down on a bench in the darkest corner of the public room. Don Carlo was sitting at a table counting over his cash. There was no one else present, and, as the landlord was suddenly called into another room, he



left the table drawer unlocked. This was a happy chance that Domenico had not expected ; he crept up to the drawer, slipped his scourge into its further corner, and then returned to his bench. Shortly after some customers entered and called for the host ; so he locked his drawer without looking in and hastened to serve them.

The room now began to fill, but Domenico remained quietly lying on his bench, with his face turned to the wall as if he were asleep. At about eight Il Turco entered, and then the boy staggered up to him ; he had wanted to walk strongly, to show how well he could bear his pain, but he was too faint and weak.

"What's the matter with you?" asked the Camorrist, as he gave the wine that had been brought him to the boy.

Domenico took a long draught, and then he said, "Turco, you used to protect me ; if you don't save me now, I shall be murdered ; look here," and he stripped off his jacket and his shirt. Even the coarse, rough men who filled the room sickened as they looked upon the torn and lacerated back.

"Who did it?"

"Those three."

"It's a lie," exclaimed Don Carlo ; "I have not touched him."

"Oh! no," continued Domenico, whose voice had now grown quite clear and strong, "of course not ; and you did not put the whip into that drawer, and swear you would give me twice as much to-morrow if I ventured to say a word to Il Turco. But I don't care ; you may kill me if you like ; he will avenge me."

The Camorrist strode up to the table. A single movement of his arm broke the lock and scattered the coins on the floor. There lay the scourge.

"I think it probable that Don Carlo will wish to



244 STORIES OF NAPLES AND THE CAMORRA

shut up his house a little earlier than usual this evening," he said to the assembled guests, and then, turning to the three, he added :—" If any one of you ventures to hurt a hair of the boy's head, or to leave the room before I return, he will be a dead man by this time to-morrow." Then, beckoning to a powerful man, he said, " Stay here," and left the room.

The man seated himself beside Domenico. An ominous silence ensued upon Il Turco's words, and one by one the guests slunk away. At about half-past nine a peculiar whistle was heard outside, to which Domenico's companion replied, and then Il Turco re-entered, with a friend.

" Shut and bolt the door," he said.

Don Carlo obeyed.

" Now the other one."

It was done.

" Bring wine."

It was placed before the Camorrists. They drank together, and then, at a sign from their leader, they threw themselves upon the host and his sons, pinioned their arms, and tied their feet together. In a minute more the prisoners had been gagged, and the two younger men were strapped down to two heavy oaken tables. Don Carlo gave somewhat more trouble, but it was not long before the cord which bound his wrists was passed over a pulley, and drawn and fastened so that he hung about six inches from the ground. Then the executioners proceeded to slit off their victims' clothes with their knives, and Il Turco produced a whip with five heavy thongs. The men seemed to enjoy their work, at which they relieved each other, the two who were unoccupied drinking and singing while the flogging went on. It was long before the Camorrist was satisfied ; but at last he said :—

" Take this as a warning. If ever I again hear the slightest complaint, it is not here you will be punished,



and next day, perhaps, your backs will not feel so sore as they are likely to do tomorrow."

Don Carlo and his sons were confined to their beds for more than a week, and from that day forward no one in the house ventured to speak a harsh word to either Domenico or Margherita, or to offer them the slightest annoyance.

The poor girl had need of rest. There had been many days in the last few months when she only dragged herself out of bed because she knew that her enemies would not leave her in peace there; and, after her bruises had ceased to ache, there was a dull pain constantly in her side, which at times seemed to shoot through all her frame. She did not talk about it, but she could not hide her lassitude, and she could do as she liked now. If she was not up by lunch time Domenico was sure to capture all the daintiest bits and bring them to her; it soon became almost a fashion for them to eat that meal alone, and then Anastasia would generally make some sweet dish in secret, and bring it up and eat it with them. When they had finished she used to stroke Domenico's head, and say, "What a pity it is you can't marry each other," and then, with a sigh, she would leave them, and as soon as she was gone the child would say, "If I were your wife you could not be kinder to me, and I could not love you more than I do."

At first, however, it was not often that Margherita really lay in bed till noon, though she stayed in the room in which she slept with her mother and Domenico till then, in order to enjoy the private meal. It was such fun to be waited on by her brother, and to have him bring her the nicest pieces, and then to feed him with the best of them. After lunch she almost always went out, and, if she happened to pass either Don Carlo or his sons, she used to spit, and they would cast down their eyes and take no notice of it. Whenever she met Il Turco she kissed his hand,



246 STORIES OF NAPLES AND THE CAMORRA

for she knew it was he who had saved her, but she did not know what a price Domenico had paid for her safety.

During this time her look and manner became even stranger than they had hitherto been. Her face, which had grown thinner and paler than before, now seemed to be nothing but the changeful mask of ever-varying passions. It was rarely that a stranger could recall the colour of the eyes and hair, or the exact form of the features, but it was long before he forgot the scorn or devotion, the mirth or anger, which was impressed upon the countenance when he saw it. Margherita's humours, too, altered more rapidly than they had done, and extended over a far wider scale. The indignity of the blows had awakened her to a new life, in which scorn was the ruling passion—a scorn not only of her former persecutors, but of herself, of her mother, of everything in the world but Domenico. There were days in which all the stories she told him were tinged with bitterness, and the child's observation had been so keen that it seemed as if the experience of a long and wretched life had furnished the materials of her contemptuous mirth. Then the childish face wore a weird look of precocious age, and the slight and graceful form somehow suggested decrepitude. At such times her chief delight was to portray her own future, not in any bright or joyous hues, but in the darkest colours. There was scarcely a sin, a folly, or a weakness of which she would not be guilty when she grew up, scarcely a degrading situation in which she would not be placed. And she was not content with merely sketching these; she painted them out, down to the smallest detail, and, springing up, she would mimic herself as a woman, pausing every now and then to interrupt the performance by an outburst of impish laughter; and then suddenly she would burst into a fit of crying, and, throwing her arms round her brother's neck, she



would sob—"But you will love me still; you will love me, in spite of all." Once she clasped both his wrists with her small, bony hands, fixed her eyes almost fiercely on his, and said—"Domenico, if I vex you, you must beat me. It is right that men should beat the women that belong to them. You may do what you like with me, but you must never leave me." At other times, however, her whole look and talk were those of a child of seven, though she was now twelve years old.

In after years it always seemed to Domenico as if this period of happy safety had lasted a long time; in fact, before eight weeks were passed Margherita ceased to get up at all. In a day or two her mother became uneasy and sent for a doctor. He shook his head, and sent her medicines which did her no good. The girl made a jest of her own laziness: as she grew weaker all her bitterness gave place to innocent gaiety; she seemed to have grown a little child again. Only she would take nothing from any one but Domenico, and was uneasy whenever he left her side. The boy did his best to nurse and amuse her. At last, when her nights grew very restless, he sat up beside her, only sleeping a little now and then in his chair.

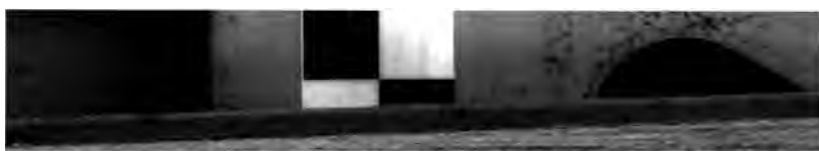
Among the prints which had formed so important a part of the children's stock-in-trade there was one which represented an old monk with a long beard. Neither of them knew the name of this saint, and that, perhaps, was one reason why Margherita entertained a peculiar affection for him. It was easier to dream and make up stories about him than about those whose legends everybody knows. During her whole illness she had kept the picture under her pillow, and one evening she asked her brother to fasten it to the wall at the foot of her bed, and to light two tapers before it. When he had done so she said, "Poor Menico, you are quite tired out; lay your

head beside mine, and sleep a little. I'll try not to wake you."

He knelt down at the bedside and did as he was bidden, and she patted his cheek. The boy was so weary with his long watching that he fell asleep almost at once. When he woke, the tapers before the unknown saint were nearly burnt out, and the hand that still rested on his face was cold and stiff.

They hung the room with black, and laid out the little emaciated body in great state. They covered it with flowers and lit large wax candles round it; and then all the neighbours came in and made such lamentation as if they had loved the girl. But Domenico sat silent in another room, and it was only when evening was come that he told his mother to send every one away, that he might bid a last good-bye to his sister. She seemed to have got so far away from him, the face that had been so bright and changeful had grown so calm and still that he did not dare to touch it with his lips; but he knelt down beside the body, and reverently took the frail hand whose last movement had been to caress him, and covered it with tears and kisses. In a moment his mind ran through the past—all the love she had borne him and all the persecutions to which she had been subjected rushed back into his memory. "I will never forget it, no, never, never, Margherita," he sobbed, "neither here, nor in hell."

Don Carlo had been enjoying himself thoroughly all day. The preparations for the funeral amused him and he was pleased that the girl was out of the way; but what really delighted him was the thought of Domenico's grief; so, as soon as he heard him pass into the room of death, he crept to the door to gladden his eyes with the sight of it. But the boy's words sent a cold shudder to his heart. He slunk away silently, and neither laughed nor rubbed his hands.



II

ON the day after the funeral, Domenico went in search of Il Turco, whom he found in one of his usual haunts.

"What do you want, my boy?" asked the Camorrist.

"To begin life; there is nothing to keep me at home now."

"Well, what do you want to be?"

"What you are."

Il Turco smiled, as Napoleon I. might have smiled if a boy of fifteen had given him a similar answer; and then, after blowing a whiff or two from his pipe, he said: "You think my life is an easy one, because you only see me when I am not at work. It is the hardest life I know, and the training for it is the most difficult."

"I don't want to lead an easy life," cried Domenico passionately, "I want to be able to revenge myself on my enemies, and to help my friends."

"You seem made of the right stuff," rejoined the man musingly, "and perhaps you ought to be."

"Give me a chance of showing it, and you shall see."

"You are still too young."

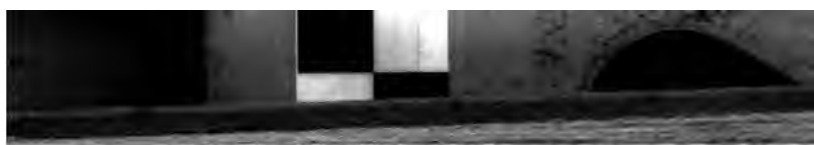
"Only try me."

"Well, I'll think it over."

The result of this conversation was that in a week or so Domenico became a *Giovane Onorato*, that is to say, he was admitted to the lowest rank in the service of the Camorra. The duties this position imposed upon him were neither pleasant nor easy. He had to attend Il Turco as a servant, to serve him as a spy, to be constantly ready at his beck and call. The Camorrist was fond of the boy, but he was entirely free from

sentimentality; he wished to make a man of him, and he therefore treated him with far greater severity than he would a youth in whose training he took smaller interest. Domenico had to sleep on the ground, to be ready to spring to his feet at the slightest call, to feed on the coarsest fare, and when Il Turco walked abroad he had generally to follow him at a respectful distance. His master rarely spoke to him except to order him about, and beat him unmercifully for the smallest mistake or negligence; yet he never uttered a complaint. At last, when six months were past, Il Turco asked him if he would not rather return home. "I'll keep the house quiet for you," he added, "and in a year or two set you up in a *taverna* of your own, where I'll see that you have plenty of custom, and in time, if you want a rich and pretty wife, I dare say I can manage that little matter for you too."

The boy positively refused the offer. From that time his real education began. The Camorrist spent an hour or so each day in teaching him how to spring, to wrestle, and to use his knife, and he insisted on his cutting and burning his own legs and arms, in order that he might learn to bear pain without wincing. In both these respects Il Turco was very proud of his pupil's progress, and made a boast of it among his companions, though he never let fall a word of praise in his presence; but he was far less satisfied with his intellectual progress. The great object of this part of his training was to teach him to observe habitually with minuteness and accuracy, and it was conducted in something like the following manner. When walking through the city the Camorrist would suddenly pause, and ask, "How was the woman dressed who sat at the door of the fourth house in the last street?" or "What were the two men talking about, whom we met at the corner of the last street but three?" or, "Where was cab 234 ordered to drive



to?" Or perhaps it would be, "What is the height of that house, and the breadth of its upper windows?" or "Where does that man live?"

At first Domenico was utterly at a loss to find an answer to such questions, and then, after he had scolded him, his master would take him into a *taverna* and give him an exact account of every person they had passed during the last half hour, and repeat every word his sharp ears had caught.

"If you want to get on," he would add in conclusion, "you must remember everything, because you can never tell beforehand what may be of use."

As the boy was now treated with more kindness, though no less severity, than before, he once ventured to ask, "Whom did we meet the day before yesterday, when we were passing out of the Porta Capuana?"

"A peasant," was the quick reply, "he was driving a donkey laden with vegetables; a girl carrying a child was walking behind him, and she stole three potatoes out of his panniers. She lives in the Mercato, and if you find her out and remind her of her theft, she'll give you a kiss not to say anything about it." The man liked to be questioned in this way, for it gave him an opportunity of displaying his gifts.

After a time the pupil also improved; indeed, he surpassed most of his contemporaries, though he never approached his master in this respect. It must be remembered, however, that closeness of observation and distinctness of memory were Il Turco's chief talents, if we except the extraordinary influence he exercised over women, from which his nickname was derived.

After some months had passed in this way, Il Turco introduced a new discipline. At first the tasks he proposed were comparatively easy: "Listen to what those people are saying," or, "See where they



252 STORIES OF NAPLES AND THE CAMORRA

are going to ; ” but in a week or two it was, “ You see that man ? Find out everything about him before we meet again. ” “ A family that I am interested in lives in the back rooms of the fourth story of that house ; let me know by Saturday how much they earn, and what they spend. ” Later on, he would give the youth a detailed description of some person who was to be found in such or such a quarter of the city, and bid him find out where he lived, or some other trifling circumstance about him.

Domenico made rapid progress in this branch of his profession, so that he was soon able to be of real use in spying upon the police and tracking persons through the town. At the same time he was taught a number of devices by which he himself could elude observation. In order to perfect him in these things the master invented a game ; while they were walking together he would suddenly disappear, and, if his pupil failed to track him, he had to pay a heavy fine. Or the youth, in his turn, was told to escape the quick eye of *Il Turco*, and towards the end of his probation he at times really succeeded in doing so. In this way they would dodge each other through the streets for hours.

Very soon after the Camorrist had seriously begun his course of instruction, he amazed the boy by taking him to a locksmith, and insisting that he should spend three hours a day in learning the trade. When he had made some progress in metal work, he was apprenticed in a similar way to a carpenter and a cabinet-maker. At the time Domenico not only hated this work on its own account, but he considered it degrading, as none of the *Giovani Onorati* of his acquaintance were expected to do anything of the kind ; but in after years he found the knowledge and skill he had thus acquired of very important use to him on more than one occasion.

One night, when nearly a year and a half had been



passed in this way, the youth was walking with his teacher through a lonely street, when the latter paused, and pointing to a small cellar window, he asked :

“ Could you get through that hole ? ”

“ No.”

“ You’ll have to, though.”

“ It’s impossible.”

“ We’ll see about that. Measure it.”

Domenico did so, and on the following morning he was ordered to construct a heavy oaken frame of exactly the same size ; when it was finished and fastened to the wall, the master said :—

“ Well, now, crawl through it.”

It was clearly impossible.

“ Oh, you have been living too well. You must go into training.”

The youth was now reduced to such short rations that they hardly seemed sufficient to keep body and soul together, and at the same time he was compelled to spend the whole day in violent exercise. Every morning the experiment with the frame was repeated. Il Turco showed him how to twist his body so as to make it pass through the smallest possible space, and in ten days’ time he found it quite possible to creep through, though he could only do so without his clothes. That afternoon the Camorrist brought him a large cloak, to the inside of which the legs of a pair of trousers were fastened, so that, when he had slipped his feet into them and wrapped the upper part of the mantle round him, the youth appeared to be fully dressed, while it was easy for him to divest himself of his garment at a moment’s notice.

“ This day week, at midnight,” said the Camorrist, “ you will creep through that hole. You will then find yourself in a cellar. The door is on the opposite side, and you must judge for yourself, when you get to it, whether it is easier to file through the lock or



254 STORIES OF NAPLES AND THE CAMORRA

remove the fastenings. When you have got into the house, and gone up four flights of stairs, you will find three rooms. It is the one to the right you must enter ; but take care, there will be people sleeping within. If they have left the door unlocked you will simply open it, and take the keys that hang upon a nail to the left. If it is fastened from the inside, you will have to remove a panel to get at them. As soon as you have secured the keys, make good your retreat. The largest of them will open the front door. Leave it in the lock, but give the others to the man who will be walking on the other side of the street, and come back to me. I tell you so long beforehand, that you may make any preparations you think necessary. You can do what you like till then ; but I should advise you to get no stouter than you are, to rub up your carpentry a little, and not to be seen more than you can help in that part of the town."

The task excited Domenico's whole ambition, for none of the other *Giovani Onorati* had been employed in a matter of so much moment or danger, and he had long sighed for a chance of distinguishing himself among them. He consequently did his very best to prepare for the great occasion, and, when the time came, he achieved the adventure with complete success. Even Il Turco seemed to be surprised at his skill, for, on his return, he welcomed him for the first time with hearty praise. It was fortunate for the youth, however, that the upper room had not been locked, as the slight inspection he was able to make convinced him that it would have been utterly impossible for him to have broken through the door without attracting attention.

His next six months were passed almost exclusively in the company of thieves and house-breakers.

"It is not that I want you to follow the profession when you grow up," his master said, "but you must



understand it thoroughly if you are to be worth anything."

This new course of instruction was greatly to the pupil's taste, as it filled his pockets at the same time as it afforded an opportunity for the display of his ingenuity.

Domenico's period of probation was unusually long. A year is generally considered sufficient ; but more than two passed before Il Turco would admit that his training was complete. The elder man had two reasons for this. He had, by his influence, succeeded in admitting the boy to the first stage of his novitiate at an unusually early age, and he was desirous of developing all his powers as fully as possible, the only means of accomplishing which seemed to him to be to retain him in a state of servitude. At last, however, the great day, or rather night, came, when even Il Turco could find no excuse for further delay.

It was five minutes to nine on the evening of a hot July day when the two entered a small *taverna* in the Vicaria. They had both frequently been there before, but on former occasions the youth had been obliged to remain in the public room, while his master passed through a door beyond. To-night both entered the inner apartment and found themselves in a large hall, where nineteen *Capi Paranze* and fifteen *Giovani Onorati* were seated, with about an equal number of *Picciotti di Sgarra*, drinking and talking together. They all rose to welcome the new-comers, and the *Giovani Onorati* brought the glasses out of which they had been drinking to Domenico, who took, as politeness required, a sip from each, and then ordered a bottle on his own account, which he divided between them. It was only a small quantity, you may think, for so many guests, but then the whole affair was merely a matter of form, and before the glasses were emptied the eldest *Capo* struck his own to command silence, and said :



256 STORIES OF NAPLES AND THE CAMORRA

"As it is already nine, and the assembly is complete, we had better proceed to business."

In a moment, two *Picciotti* passed out into the public room ; two locked and bolted the door which led to it, and placed themselves before it with their drawn knives, while two others posted themselves as guards beside a door at the opposite end of the room. As soon as this had been done, the *Capo* who had spoken produced a key, and opened the further door, and the rest of the company formed themselves into single line, the *Capi* who had no pupils going first, and each of the *Giovani Onorati* following his master. They went down a flight of steps and through three heavy doors, each of which was closed as soon as they had passed, and guarded by two *Picciotti*, and at last arrived at a roomy cellar, brilliantly lighted with lamps and torches. A row of elevated benches occupied the further end, and on these the leader, accompanied by the three other *Capi* who had brought no pupils with them, took their seats. On both sides were benches exactly similar, on which the other *Capi* placed themselves, and before each stood his *Giovane Onorato*. A free space of some extent was thus left in the middle of the cellar.

As soon as all had taken their places, the *Capo* who acted as president rose, and, after making a few remarks, he produced a list and gave it to the *Picciotto* who stood before him. The latter at once began to read the roll-call. Each *Capo* rose as soon as he was named, and presented his *Giovane* to the Association. When this ceremony was finished, the *Giovani Onorati* were drawn up in the centre of the room, and an oath was administered to each, by which he bound himself never to reveal anything that he knew or suspected with respect to the Camorra, and in case of his being seriously wounded in the course of the evening, or at any future time, by one of its members, to preserve the name of his assailant a profound secret, "trusting



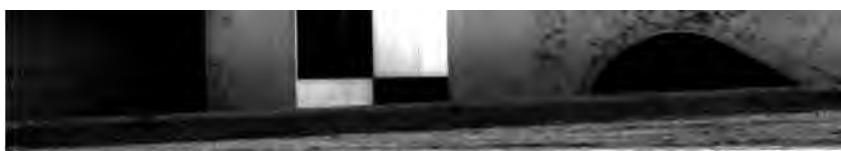
to his brothers, and to his brothers alone, to help and to avenge him." As soon as the oath had been taken, the *Giovani Onorati* returned to their place.

The list was now produced, and the first *Capo* brought his pupil forward. He was an overgrown, weakly youth, who challenged the smallest of his rivals. They unclasped their knives and ran at each other, but so clumsily that everybody saw the duel had been pre-arranged, and the President ordered them to be excluded from the assembly, which was at once done. Il Turco's was the second name, and as soon as it was mentioned Domenico stepped forth. He bowed to the president and the other *capi*, and said he resigned his right to choose an opponent, but was ready to meet any one who chose to match him. An underset, but powerful youth, Ciro by name, at once offered himself, and a terrible conflict ensued. In about five minutes, however, Domenico struck his enemy such a blow in his side that he fell to the ground, and was unable to rise. Two *Picciotti* at once took up the wounded man, and carried him through a side door into a neighbouring street, where they left him. It was not heartlessness that induced them to do so. An arrangement had previously been made by which a considerable number of respectable citizens had bound themselves to go home by that way, in twos and twos, and to see that any wounded person they chanced to find was brought to the hospital.

Domenico's next opponent was a youth of great courage, but quite unequal to him in skill. Everybody present perceived that Domenico treated him with great generosity, and the President put a stop to the conflict as soon as he decently could. It is unnecessary to dwell on the combats that immediately followed. Our hero succeeded in disabling two of the strongest of the remaining youths, by wounding them in their right hands, and when one,

who was obviously weaker, appeared on the scene, he resolved to give a final proof of his courage and dexterity. Taking his own knife between his teeth, he darted at his adversary's throat, seized it with his right hand, and bore him backwards by sheer strength to the earth; with his left, he seized his enemy's open knife, wrenched it from him, and threw it to the other end of the room. The applause which had followed each of Domenico's victories now became frantic, but, when he rose, the blood was streaming from his left hand, and it was clear to those who stood near that the fingers were cut almost to the bone. He merely loosened the handkerchief from his neck, bound it round them, and resumed his place. The President, however, told him he had done enough and bade him withdraw. Il Turco then took him aside to examine him, and found that his left arm had been pierced in two places, once in the upper part, and once below the elbow; besides this, there was a long cut on his left side, but it was little more than a scratch. By the time his wounds had been properly attended to the fighting was finished, and the whole company was ready to return to the up stairs room, where a banquet was awaiting them. Domenico was the hero of the evening; he was appointed a *Picciotto di Sgarra* by acclamation, the President gave him a cap with a gold band and tassel and a large ring, and Il Turco presented him with a watch and a gilt chain. The festivities lasted till late on the following morning, and every mouth was full of his praise.

The following weeks, too, were pleasant, and flattering to his vanity. Everybody seemed desirous of purchasing his favour by flattery and tribute of a more substantial kind. When he walked through the streets the prettiest girls in the neighbourhood were almost sure to be standing at the doors, or looking out of the windows, and hardly an evening passed



without his being invited to some supper, or giving one in return for the many civilities offered him. He enjoyed himself thoroughly, and was particularly glad to hear that *Ciro*, who had, of course, declared that he did not know who his assailant had been, was doing well. As soon as it was safe to do so, he visited him, and they swore eternal friendship. *Don Carlo* and his sons, too, endeavoured to conciliate him by a present of a hundred ducats. He accepted the money, but there was an evil smile on his face when he locked it into a little box which he had once given to *Margherita*, and in which a coral necklace and two earrings of hers lay. That was money which he felt he could not spend on mirth; but was there not a purpose to which it might appropriately be applied?

Il Turco thought his pupil had earned a holiday, and so he left him to enjoy himself as he liked for a time. When nearly two months had passed, however, he asked him one morning:—

“Don’t you think it’s nearly time to begin work again?”

“I am ready at any moment.”

“That is fortunate, for the *Camorra* has something for you to do.”

“What is it?”

“The police are on the track of an old acquaintance of yours. It’s a matter of housebreaking, and, as he has been caught often already, it’s likely to go hardly with him if he is run down. The easiest way to save him is to turn the suspicion on you. You’ll defend yourself, of course, but you must do it in such a way as to be condemned at last. Come, come, don’t be down-hearted. As you’re a new hand, and we shall do what we can for you, they’re not likely to give you more than a year or eighteen months, and it isn’t a bad kind of life when one has got used to it.”

This was by no means welcome news, but Domenico knew it was useless for him to make objections, so, as soon as his master had left, he consigned the box which contained the hundred ducats to the charge of the *Contarulo*, as the financial minister of the Association is called, and, having thus brought his worldly affairs into order, he prepared to enjoy the short period of freedom that was left him to the utmost of his power.

Il Turco went off singing. He felt no pity for Domenico ; indeed he would not have been sorry if the youth had fallen into the hands of the police a month or two sooner, during one of the criminal enterprises in which he had then been engaged ; for he was accustomed to send his pupils to gaol much as country ladies send their daughters to a boarding-school for a year or so, to add a finishing grace to their manners and accomplishments. On the present occasion his plan succeeded to admiration. Domenico was charged with the crime, tried and condemned in due course of law, and sentenced to two years' imprisonment. This was a rather longer period than the Camorrist had anticipated, but what did a few months more or less matter ? He was not a man who was accustomed to trouble himself about such trifles.

During his first incarceration, Domenico acquired a great deal of useful knowledge. He was amply supplied with funds by the Camorra, and treated with respect by the gaolers, with two of whom he contracted an intimate friendship. His companions in misfortune looked up to him with awe and submitted to all his orders, and he entirely lost any vague dread of prison life which he may have formerly felt. On his release the Association gave a banquet in his honour, and he was admitted to the full dignity of a Camorrist, with all the rights and privileges it involves.



III

WHILE Domenico was in gaol his mother died, and, as soon as he was restored to society, he earnestly entreated Il Turco publicly to acknowledge him as a son. The elder man displayed considerable unwillingness to grant this request. "Let things remain as they are," he argued ; "I spend everything I earn as soon as I get it, and Don Carlo has some little property. He will not dare to disinherit you, and, after his death, his sons will not venture to deny you your rightful share of his goods. But, if we openly proclaim that you are not his child, we lose every hold on him in this matter. Leave well alone."

But Domenico still insisted. No pecuniary profit could reconcile him to the thought of a supposed relationship to the man he loathed and hated, and so at last Il Turco had to give way. As soon as Don Carlo heard a whisper of what was contemplated he foreboded evil, and offered the elder Camorrist a considerable sum on condition of his taking no further steps in this matter. Il Turco referred him to Domenico, who was already beginning to be known by the name of Pesce Cane, or the Shark ; but the youth was inexorable, and the innkeeper returned home with greater dread than he had left it. Nor had he long to wait before his apprehensions were realised.

A few nights later, when the public room of the *taverna* was thronged with guests, Il Turco rose and said that, now that Anastasia was dead, he had resolved to recognise Pesce Cane as his son, and that he was ready to give convincing proof of the fact to anybody who felt inclined to doubt it.

Domenico responded that he did not believe that what his father had said would be news to any one



present. His mother had confided the truth to him while he was still a child, and every one knew how Il Turco had protected him from his earliest infancy ; but he was glad that an open statement had now been made, as it enabled him to say that he should henceforth treat every man as his personal enemy who pretended to believe that he was related to Don Carlo. He could not deny that the innkeeper's two sons were his half-brothers, but they had long since forfeited every claim on his affections which might seem to arise from the fact that they had the same mother, and he herewith announced to them and those present that he regarded all three as his bitterest foes, and warned them to be on their guard, as he intended to take every open and secret opportunity of obtaining revenge. The two Camorrists then left the room together, and they were followed by the larger part of the guests.

An hour later the doors were locked and bolted, and Don Carlo and his sons were sitting alone together. They looked upon themselves as men condemned to death, but the elder of the sons had drawn a certain courage from despair.

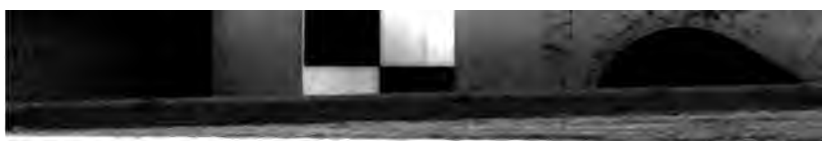
"We must stand by each other," he had argued, and seize the first opportunity of putting our knives into Domenico. If I had had my way, it would have been done years ago."

"If it were only he," Don Carlo had replied, "but there are Il Turco and all the rest."

"We can't be worse off than we are now, and we shall at least have struck a blow."

It was in vain ; his father and brother were so cowed by a dread which had long become habitual, that his words awakened no echo in their hearts.

"Very well," he said at last. "As there is not a spark of manliness left in you, I renounce all connection with you. Give me what money there is in the drawer."



Don Carlo began to make excuses and difficulties, but his son's blood was up ; he seized his father's throat with his left hand, and a large kitchen knife with his right.

" Shall I do Pesce Cane's work for him ? Perhaps he would forgive me if I told him I had sent you to hell."

The elder man fell on his knees and produced the key. The youth opened the drawer, took all the money it contained, and left the room. He packed it and such of his clothes as he thought it worth while to take with him into a bundle, slung it over his shoulders, and left the city before sunrise. Neither his father nor his brother ever heard of him again. When they were alone, Don Carlo's younger son, who had not ventured to move a finger in his defence, overwhelmed him with querulous complaints. The innkeeper covered his face with his hands, and said nothing.

The objects of Domenico's wrath expected that he would act quickly. It was his knife that they dreaded. They never dared to go out of doors, and in the house they always kept a light burning, and one watched, with a revolver on the table before him, while the other slept. They were quite mistaken as to his character and purpose. He enjoyed the misery he knew they suffered so well that he would have sincerely regretted their death, because they would have been safe from his vengeance in the grave. But, on the other hand, evils which they had not expected overtook them. They had done a thriving business, because their house was frequented by Camorristi, who were liberal with their money. Il Turco had brought them there, and they left with him ; and the few other guests who had patronised them soon deserted a house which had grown still and empty, and was considered ominous. This was the severest punishment that could fall upon Don Carlo's son,

who was already an inveterate gambler. His brother had carried off all their ready money, and no new cash flowed in ; so that, even if he had dared to go abroad, he had nothing to stake on his favourite game ; and the monotony of his indoor life, and the fear which constantly preyed upon him, rendered him doubly eager for the accustomed excitement, which would enable him to forget his cares for a moment. In his despair he took to playing with his father for coffee-beans, buttons, and other quite worthless objects.

About this time a new guest began to visit the *taverna*. He was an old man, who was said to be a usurer, and who had hitherto taken all his meals at home ; that is, in the fourth story of a neighbouring house. It was said that he had quarrelled with his housekeeper, and this report reached Don Carlo's ears by means of one of his servants. He came regularly to lunch and dinner, sat quietly in his place, and never spoke an unnecessary word. Of an evening, however, he had a habit of drinking his wine after instead of during his meal, and at such times he would sit and watch his host and his son at their play. They were so lonely now that even the presence of a single guest was a relief, and they soon began to chat in a friendly way with the old man. One night he asked them to explain the game of cards which they usually played. They at once did so, and, after some persuasion, they induced him to take a hand, but only on condition that they should not play for money. From thenceforth the three sat together every evening, each with his heap of coffee-beans, instead of money, before him, and played until late in the night. The old man was not only entirely unskilled, but he seemed wanting in all the qualities which are requisite in a good player. He forgot the cards that had been played, and made the most stupid mistakes ; yet he soon became passionately interested in the game, and he clutched



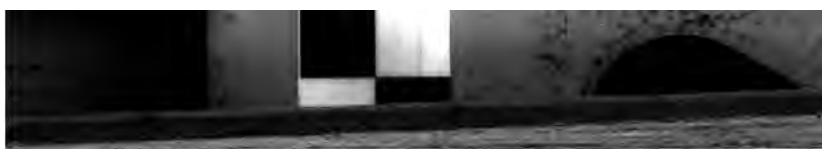
the coffee-beans with his long and tremulous hands as eagerly as if they had been gold pieces. The innkeeper saw this, and resolved to turn it to his advantage. One Saturday he yawned a good deal, and on the following evening he positively refused to take his accustomed place. It was tiresome, he said, to go on playing the same game, day after day, for stakes that had no value. The usurer with some difficulty induced the son to bring the cards, but, as soon as three games were finished, he, too, refused to go on. The old man fidgeted about on his chair for a minute or two, and then drew out a handful of *grani*; he did not mind playing for money once in a way, he said, if it were only for coppers. The others at once accepted the invitation. The old man now played more eagerly than ever. As the game went on the stakes were increased.

Next evening there was no thought of coffee-beans, and at the end of the week the innkeeper found he had won twenty ducats. He then agreed with his son that it might be well to allow their guest to gain a stake or so now and then, in order to keep his spirits up; and that was perhaps the reason why their earnings next week were not considerable. Fortune then fluctuated for a time, and at last it set steadily against them. Their opponent still played as badly as ever, but he had such luck that even his mistakes prospered, and turned out as successful as the cleverest hits. Their resources were soon exhausted, but their new friend was ready to supply them with money at an exceptionally low rate of interest rather than lose the pleasure of the game. Indeed, he showed himself to be exceedingly good-natured, and when he lost he always paid in hard cash instead of returning them their notes of hand. The younger man was eager and confident. It was all mere luck, he declared, and, if they only played long enough, luck must turn. Don Carlo might have been more prudent if the

terror in which he lived had not rendered him reckless ; as it was, his infatuation was as great as that of his son, and so, to make a long story short, in about six months' time they suddenly awoke to the fact that they had lost everything they possessed except the clothes they had on their backs and fifteen ducats.

On the evening of the day on which they were sold up, the usurer paid a visit to Domenico, and, with a thousand expressions of submission and gratitude, he presented him with a full third of his winnings. As soon as he was gone, the Camorrist put the whole sum into Margherita's box. He had not opened it since the day when he put Don Carlo's hundred ducats into it, and, as his eyes fell on the little necklace, they grew dim, and he murmured under his breath : " I have not forgotten it, child, you see. I will never forget it."

It was not for long, however, that his mind dwelt on such melancholy thoughts. Since his release from prison he had been enjoying himself thoroughly, and he had now a new adventure on hand. He liked his work, he was admired by his comrades, he had made himself a high position, though he was little more than twenty years of age, and he had begun to feel that the sweetest fruit of his success was the consideration that the women of his own class showed for him. Young, handsome, and noted for his daring and resolution, he had rarely reason to complain of the spirit in which his advances were met, and he had already had several affairs of the heart. He had never seriously thought of marriage, however, until about a month before, when he and Ciro had sauntered through the grotto, and seated themselves in the garden of a *trattoria* at Fuorigrotta to enjoy the country air and the wine of the district. They had not been there long before a family party, consisting of nearly a dozen persons, arrived and took their places at



a neighbouring table. Among the new-comers was a girl who might be about seventeen years of age. She was not by any means a beauty, but she had large, sparkling black eyes, a full and well proportioned form, and the grace and ease of movement that are rarely wanting in a young Neapolitan girl of the lower classes, who has had no dancing or posture master but nature. In many respects she might have reminded an elderly man of what Anastasia had been in her youth, but there was more habitual brightness and a smaller capacity of passion in her face. She was dressed with great care, taste, and elegance, but there was no originality in her costume. It was that of a class slightly above her own, though made with greater precision and of better materials. She had no hat, but her hair was so full, and its heavy coils set off her features so well, that a stranger who saw her for the first time might well have been in doubt whether she went bareheaded from class prejudice or from coquetry. She sat opposite Domenico, so that he could watch all her movements, and she evidently enjoyed the good things the landlord provided. She drank freely too, and after every draught she leant her head backwards, and then the youth fancied he could see the deep purple wine glowing through the clear brown of her throat. All his senses were on fire, and he did everything in his power to attract her attention. The girl took no notice of him, she seemed entirely absorbed in the young man who sat beside and the food that stood before her. He evidently belonged to the middle class, he was dressed in scrupulous obedience to the newest fashion, and possessed kid gloves, tightly fitting boots, and a pale, ineffectual face. Domenico, after a time, fixed his gaze upon him, and soon caught his eye. In a moment his rival became uneasy and confused, and then the girl glanced at the neighbouring table. She had in-

tended her look to express coldness, wonder, and indignation; but, somehow, her eyes fell before Domenico's; she became silent and constrained. She did not regain her gaiety, or venture to look in the same direction, all the evening, and on the way home she was peevish and capricious to her lover.

Domenico found no difficulty in tracking the game he had started. In a day he knew that her name was Graziella, and that she lived alone with her widowed mother and an old servant, in the front rooms of a second story in a house in the Vicolo Vasto. In two days more he was acquainted with all her circumstances. Her father, a fruiterer who had made his way in the world, had left a considerable property to her and her mother, and, as she was a bright, pleasant girl, she had had many suitors. Her mother favoured a tobacconist, a well-to-do widower who had three children, but the daughter was averse to the match, and seemed to prefer a young tailor, who had no property or prospects, nor, as far as the neighbours could see, anything but his clothes to recommend him. The conflict between the women had continued for more than a year, but the widow had at last given way, and Graziella was to be betrothed to Errico on Tuesday. It was on Monday evening that the usurer brought Domenico the money.

All that week he had haunted the street in which Graziella lived, at one time wooing her with a sentimental, and at another taunting her with a satirical, song. But his efforts had been vain; she had taken no notice of him. He had hitherto been accustomed to easy conquests, and her coldness piqued the passion her appearance had excited; but, for all that, he would hardly have contemplated marriage if the girl had possessed neither dowry nor prospects. As it was, he had made up his mind to win her,



and it was clear that the matter had best be decided to-night.

Though this was no task in which he could invoke the formal countenance of the Camorra, his connection with that body had brought him into relation with a number of associates on whom he knew he could rely in any enterprise that required daring. *Ciro* was bound to him by the most loyal admiration and friendship; the housebreaker for whom he had suffered imprisonment was eager to give a proof of his gratitude, and *Il Turco* supported him with the whole weight of his influence, though it was thought better that he should remain in the background for the present. Indeed, the matter proved easier than they had at first expected. The porter of the house was in some vague way related to *Ciro*, and he was accessible both to bribes and to threats. As both were freely applied, he admitted the conspirators to an empty apartment next to that occupied by *Graziella* and her mother, and sat there with them drinking and smoking, while *Domenico* carried out his scheme.

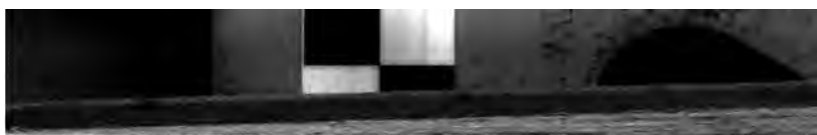
Shortly after midnight, he forced his way into the room in which the three women were sleeping. He carried a drawn knife in his hand, and two revolvers, visibly enough, in his belt. When they woke and saw an armed man standing there, in the dim light that burned before the image of a saint, they were too terrified to scream, and before they had recovered their presence of mind, he said in a low but imperative voice:—"Be still; the first of you who moves or speaks is a corpse."

They clung tremblingly to each other, but they obeyed. Then, advancing close to the bed, he added:—"I am no robber, I shall be sorry to do you any harm; but, *Graziella*, I am so much in love with you that I am determined that, if I do not possess you, no one else shall." Then, turning to the widow with the utmost respect, he continued: "*Donna*

Grazia, I am very sorry to disturb your rest, and shall be distressed if my visit should cause you any further unpleasantness, but, of course, if I am obliged to act with harshness to your daughter, I shall also be compelled to put an end to you and the old woman, in order that no witnesses may be left to inform against me ;" and his fingers fidgeted on his knife while he spoke.

The girl now ventured to glance upwards at him, and there was a certain admiration as well as fear in her eyes ; but, in a moment more, she had covered her face with the bedclothes. The look was enough to convince Domenico that, if he should be forced to proceed to extremes, it would be wisest to begin with the mother or the old woman. They did not oblige him to do so. After a number of evasions, entreaties, and excuses, which he silenced by simply feeling the edge of his knife and cutting a straw with it, they gave way, and before he left the room he was betrothed to Graziella by every holy oath he could remember or invent.

Donna Grazia was not one of those persons who suffer from sleeplessness, and, as her rest had been disturbed, she made up for it by remaining in bed till eleven o'clock on the following day. Still, her morning thoughts were hardly agreeable. It was unpleasant to her to remember that her future son-in-law had seen her without the false hair of which she was so proud, and that she had promised her daughter to a man of whom she knew nothing, except that he had forced his way into her bedroom. At first it was rather satisfactory to her to think that the designs of the tailor had been thwarted ; but, in a minute or two, she felt more distressed than ever, because she could not invent any excuse which would be at all likely to appear satisfactory to him and his friends, when they came in the afternoon to celebrate his betrothal with Graziella. And then she had ordered



a quantity of cake and ice for the occasion. That would, of course, be wasted, and Donna Grazia hated waste. It was a melancholy comfort to her to put on her thickest plaits and her smartest clothes. She felt that she needed all the support she could devise from them.

Her daughter viewed the matter somewhat differently. She was, of course, obliged to feel a little sorry for the loss of the tailor, whom only a few days before she had professed to love so passionately that nothing but death could separate her from him, but she did not find it easy to be so sad as she knew she ought to be. There was something in the recklessness of her new lover that took her fancy ; and it flattered her vanity to think that she could inspire a passion which did not hesitate even at crime. Errico had looked very noble and distinguished when compared with the tobacconist, and she had been ready to consider his effeminacy and his feline ways as a mark of high-breeding, as long as her choice only lay between him and a portly man of forty, whose coat was greasy and smelt of bad cigars, and who never appeared amiable except when he was playing with his three spoilt and dirty children ; but he hardly looked so heroic when opposed to a youth of twenty, with a drawn knife and two revolvers. There was nothing ethereal in Graziella's temperament ; she loved wine and good, or at least plentiful, meals, and it had often irritated her to see how the tailor sipped for a whole evening at his single glass, and played with the food set before him, even when he had not to pay for it ; and paying for anything was what, in the whole course of his daily and weekly life, distressed him most. While the conflict between mother and daughter continued, the widow had frequently said that, pale as he was, he would part with a drop of his heart's blood rather than a soldo, and, of all her taunts, this had vexed Graziella most, because she felt its

truth. Now Domenico, as she had seen, had drunk two *caraffe* at Fuorigrotta, and he had tossed money to the waiters as if he had been a prince. On the whole, she felt that, if she were obliged to marry against her will, fate could hardly have provided her with a less unpleasant husband: and, if Domenico and her old lover could have been placed side by side, without favour or prejudice, I, for my own part, have but few doubts as to which she would have chosen.

Her favourable impressions as to her future husband were encouraged by the servant woman, who had long acted as the confidante of both mother and daughter without betraying the trust of either. She praised the person, the courage, and the taste of Domenico, who had estimated Graziella's beauty at its true value, and been ready to risk everything for it; and she blessed herself that she should see her young mistress married to a real man after all. Errico had certainly been better than the malodorous lump of tallow; but she had always thought him too poor-spirited a fellow to deserve the love of such a girl. She might be wrong; if she was he had a chance of proving it now. In case he met his rival openly, or secretly put him out of the way, she, for her own part, would never say another word against him; but, if he did not, he was not worthy of so lovely a wife. The other young fellow had been rather rough in his wooing, it was true, but his temper would cool down, and every woman who was worth anything would rather take a beating from her husband now and then than see him the laughing-stock of the neighbours.

When she was called to Donna Grazia, the old woman sang the same tune, though in a somewhat different key. She assured her mistress that the young man had not noticed the appearance of her locks, for he had kept his eyes fixed on Graziella the whole time, and, even when she hid her face, he had not moved them from the place where she lay. Then



she went on to argue that, though he certainly was not such a husband as one would have chosen for the young heiress if one had had one's own choice, he was certainly better than the tailor. She herself would have preferred a man of substance, an elderly man, who had experience enough to lead a young girl in the right way ; but, after all, one could not have everything one wished. If no joint is to be had, one must take macaroni, and remember that it is better than beans. The tobacconist had certainly been the most eligible of all Graziella's suitors ; but then he had been rejected beforehand, and the tailor would never have forgiven his mother-in-law the determined opposition she had offered to his wishes ; whereas Domenico would doubtless be all gratitude to her if only she exerted her influence in his favour. Poor fellow, he had certainly been guilty of a crime ; but then, had not Donna Grazia herself been young, and would she have considered it unpardonable if, when the beauty which was now in full flower was in the bud, one of her lovers had ventured everything to possess her ?

These remarks had considerable weight with Donna Grazia. She at once perceived that it would be wise for her to establish as good an understanding as she could with her son-in-law, particularly as he seemed to be a youth of strong feelings ; and so, when Il Turco called at half-past twelve, she received him graciously. His dress and appearance were very different to those he usually wore, and they at once made a favourable impression on the widow. He spoke warmly in his son's praise, though he acknowledged he had been guilty of some youthful indiscretions, and that his conduct on the preceding evening had been quite inexcusable. But the quietest boys don't make the best men. Il Turco himself had been a little wild before his marriage, and all that Domenico wanted was a good wife to keep him in order. Donna Grazia need not trouble herself in

any way about Errico and his friends ; he would undertake to inform them of the change that had been made in Donna Grazia's plans ; and, as to the cakes and ice, why should not he, his son, and a few friends, take the place of the discarded lover and his family ? The formal betrothal could not take place for the next few days, of course ; but, under the peculiar circumstances in which they were placed, it might be well to allow the young people to see a little more of each other. The party would also give Donna Grazia an opportunity of introducing her future son-in-law to her most intimate acquaintances. She might represent the change of bridegrooms as a jest which she and her daughter had secretly planned, and he did not think that any one who loved Graziella would think she had made a bad exchange.

Donna Grazia at once consented. She was delighted to see so easy a way out of all her difficulties. She conceived a great esteem for her visitor, and was only too glad to leave the whole responsibility and trouble of making arrangements to him ; and he managed matters so cleverly that in ten days Graziella was Domenico's wife.

They both of them enjoyed their new life greatly. The girl was very proud and a little afraid of her husband, and, after such a wooing, she felt no inclination to oppose his will. Their tastes coincided too, for both were fond of good living, and the Camorrist liked his wife to be well-dressed, especially as they had plenty of money in hand, and he was not accustomed to take much thought of the morrow. At times Donna Grazia was apprehensive that they were living beyond their means, but she stood too much in awe of her son-in-law to interfere ; and, as Il Turco, who had become a great comfort to her, assured her that everything was as it should be, she concluded that Domenico had more property, either in possession or prospect, than she had at first



supposed. It was so like his kind, wise father to conceal his wealth!

All pleasant things, however, even a wife's dowry, are apt to come to an end, unless they are used with moderation, and Domenico was beginning to ponder over various schemes for increasing his income, when his mother-in-law kindly died. This replenished his treasury, and enabled him to turn his mind from such worldly thoughts, and continue the easy and careless life he enjoyed so well. During all this time, however, his mind had not been idle, nor was he so entirely absorbed by his domestic happiness as to forget Don Carlo and his son.

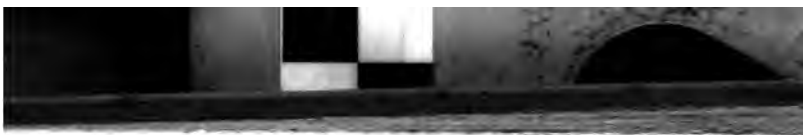
When the two were driven out of the house that had served them as a burrow in which to hide from their enemy, they slunk about the streets in constant dread of his knife, until they found another hole that promised safety. It was not long, however, before they were driven from their new refuge by hunger. They had both been used, all their lives long, to the rough, coarse plenty which seemed luxury to their class, and they had never done any harder work than waiting on their guests. Even under the most favourable circumstances it would have been difficult for them to discover the means of earning a tolerable livelihood; what, then, could they hope for now that they felt they were risking their lives every time that they ventured out? At first they sat together, and overwhelmed each other with bitter curses and recriminations; but, as their little store slowly dwindled, and they were brought face to face with the probability of absolute starvation, the new dread overcame the old one, and drove them abroad in search of employment. Domenico had kept himself accurately informed as to all their movements, and since his marriage it had been the amusement of his leisure hours to thwart their efforts to find an occupation. He was fully aware that disappointment is the

sharpest of mental pains, and so he did not deprive them of hope. Every now and then he allowed them to find a position in which a tolerable existence seemed possible, and then, as soon as they began to think that the worst was over, they were cast out of it. On such occasions they usually met him on their way home, and his smile said more distinctly than words: "It is I who did it." But his malice did not pause there; it descended to the most trifling particulars. For instance, Don Carlo, who was subject to rheumatism, had a pair of felt slippers, which he had saved from the wreck of his household. They were the sole comfort still left him, and, out of prudence, he only used them when the weather was very cold. Early in the winter Domenico gave a boy a ducat to steal them, and he hung them up on the wall opposite the foot of his bed. No one but himself knew how untiring and particular his persecution was, for he employed a new agent for every new act of oppression, and bound him over to the strictest secrecy. The reason for doing so was that he found the delight which he took in inflicting little injuries upon them disgusted his own associates.

Il Turco had taken him to task in the matter. "You have surely had vengeance enough," he said, "if not, take your knife; such paltry torture as you delight in contriving is fitter for a woman than a man."

"You are the only man living," Domenico had replied, "who dare use such words to me, and even you had better not go too far."

The matter dropped there, but both had learnt a lesson from the conversation which they never forgot. The father was henceforth more careful as to how he interfered with his son's designs, or expressed any opinion about them, and Domenico concluded that, as even Il Turco shrunk from the persistency of his hatred, his other associates were not likely to regard



it with favour, and that it would be wisest for him to conceal it. He therefore kept the great purpose of his life secret, even from his most intimate friends.

Hitherto his efforts had been crowned with marked success. He had excluded his enemies from every employment, so that at last they had given up the attempt to find an honest means of earning a livelihood in despair; he had warned the criminal classes against them as knaves and traitors, so that even the chance of stealing their daily bread was closed to them, and, when they took to begging, he had leagued himself with other beggars so as to render their gains as small, and their new occupation as intolerable, as possible. But there was a limit to his power; he could not reduce them to literal starvation, for he had no influence within the walls of the monasteries, and at the gate of one or other of these Don Carlo and his son were sure of a daily dole of bread and soup. And so, as Domenico concluded that they had already become so accustomed to their misery as not to feel it very acutely, he was pondering a new scheme for varying and increasing it.

At one part of his life, as we have seen, he had been to all intents and purposes a member of a gang of housebreakers, and, though he had of late taken no active part in their operations, he remained on friendly terms with his old associates, and had rendered several of them important services. He now resolved to employ one of them, Andrea by name, in the execution of his design. He preferred him to the elder man whose punishment he had borne, because, as he was less distinguished in his profession, he was less intimate with Il Turco and the other friends of his own youth, and so less likely either to suspect, or unconsciously to betray, his purpose by any remark that he might make in an unguarded hour.

The young housebreaker was flattered by the attention which Pesce Cane showed him on several

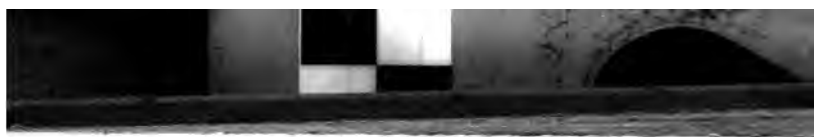
occasions, and sought his company whenever it was possible to do so. Once, when they were walking together, Domenico turned their steps, as if by chance, in a direction that led them past the gate of a monastery at which he knew Don Carlo and his son were pretty sure to be standing at that hour, and, pointing them out to his companion, he said, "Those are two old enemies of mine, whom I have ruined; and now they are so wretched that I am fool enough to pity them. If you have an odd job to do now and then, you may as well give it them. But don't put the least trust in them; they're born traitors."

Andrea was only too glad to find an opportunity of proving his esteem and gratitude to Pesce Cane, and he was at once too polite and too prudent to trouble him with any disagreeable questions.

After a pause, however, Domenico continued: "By the way, you had better not say anything about the matter. Il Turco and the rest would never leave off twitting me if they knew I had been so womanish. And don't let the men know it either, or they will presume on my soft-heartedness, and as soon as they lift their heads too high I shall of course have to duck them again."

Andrea vowed to observe the deepest secrecy.

The result of this conversation was a considerable improvement in the position of Don Carlo and his son. By means of Andrea's protection they frequently obtained employment, though only of the most servile sort; the younger man had occasionally a *grano* or two to spend in wine or to lose at cards, and the elder began seriously to contemplate the possibility of purchasing a new pair of felt slippers. Their appearance, too, had improved, for Andrea and his friends had given them several old articles of dress, and, as they frequently ran errands for their new masters, and were constantly at their beck and call, it soon became an understood thing that they might



have a plateful of broken victuals at the *taverna* which the housebreakers chiefly frequented, whenever they wanted it.

On the other hand, the police, who had hitherto regarded the two men as harmless mendicants, now began to view them with suspicion. They were in the service of notorious housebreakers, their position in life was evidently improving, and the very fact that a strict watch led to the discovery of nothing that told against them was considered a proof of their cunning rather than of their innocence. It began to be whispered about among the constables of the district that the miserable-looking old man was, in fact, in the possession of an immense hoard of golden wealth. Nobody knew how the story first got abroad, but it found eager listeners, and innumerable incidents were remembered, or invented, in its support, so that it was soon expanded into a legend of whose authority no one entertained a doubt. To lay his hands on this fabulous treasure was the dream of every ambitious recruit, and the failure of one plan of entrapping its possessor only led to the formation of a new one and the confirmation of the general impression as to his guilt and craft. Thus, to take only a single instance, a member of the secret police, who had but newly come to the city, and was therefore unknown there, soon managed to pick up an acquaintance with Don Carlo's son, and found that it was no difficult matter to make him drunk. When he was in his cups his companion led him on to talk about the doings of Andrea and his associates, and he blurted out all he knew; but this was so little—so much less, in fact, than was known to the authorities—that the policeman concluded that his guest had only feigned drunkenness to mislead him, as it was inconceivable that any servant should be so ignorant of the secret of his employers.

In fact the housebreakers were very careful to

conceal every matter of importance from Don Carlo and his son. Andrea well remembered Domenico's warning, of which he had informed the rest, and there was nothing about either of the two men which invited intimacy or confidence. They did the errands on which they were sent accurately enough, and there was therefore no excuse for dismissing them, particularly as Andrea seemed to have his own reasons for employing them, but there was not a single member of the band who did not view them with contempt and dislike. The father's sufferings had brought on a premature old age. He would sit for hours in the sunshine, in a state of maudlin misery, either entirely silent, or talking to himself in a low querulous tone; these periods of morbid self-absorption had become shorter and rarer, and he had resumed his old habit of chuckling and rubbing his hands. But it was only when some misfortune happened to others that he showed these signs of mirth, and then he would look furtively over his shoulder, as if he feared that an enemy was standing behind him. The sight of pain was like wine to the old man, and it seemed to have become a matter of indifference to him whether it was his friend or his foe that suffered; only his enjoyment seemed to gain a little zest if it was a child. He was very careful to do his errands as quickly as possible, and, when sent upon them, would run uphill so quickly as to bring on the cough which seemed to tear his chest in pieces, but, if a boy was being beaten, he would pause to view the operation, and linger about till the last cry was stilled; after which he would go on his way rejoicing. The hostess of the *taverna* had been touched by his wretched condition and she had never shown anything but kindness to him; yet, when her little daughter, a girl of four years old, fell down and cut her forehead open against an iron bar, he could not refrain from taking a place beside the bed in which



the child had been laid, telling the mother that, if the wound healed, it would leave a frightful scar, and enlarging on the way in which that would disfigure her when she grew up and it was time for her to be thinking about marriage. He had still cunning enough to try to assume a voice of the deepest sympathy, but the woman could hear the suppressed chuckle in it, and she noticed the nervous twitching of the hands, which he kept thrust firmly down into his trousers' pockets to prevent their rubbing against each other.

The son was perhaps a shade less malignant, but he was more actively spiteful. The old man rarely inflicted pain, but woe be to the masterless cat or dog which fell into the hands of the younger when he was in a cheerful humour or had nothing particular to do. He was known for his faithlessness, too, and for an inveterate habit of cheating at cards, even when he was playing only to keep his hand in and without any stakes. He was addicted to drink and to the lowest forms of vice, and the only restraint his passions knew was fear, for he and his father were the most cowardly of mortals. Once, when several of the band had to go into hiding, it was impossible to conceal from the two men that something unusual was going on. The younger was at once struck by terror, and began to revolve plans of securing his own safety by communicating with the police. What a pity it was he knew so little to tell them!

At that moment Andrea's eye fell on the pale face and trembling form, and, going up to his servant, he said, "What are you frightened of? You surely know you are far too wicked to be hanged. But just listen. However many of us may be taken, enough of our friends will remain at large to roast you over a slow fire, and they will do it if any misfortune happens to us."

The man felt as if the flames were already curling

round his back, and at once abandoned all thought of giving information to the police.

About a year had passed in this way, when Andrea one evening found Domenico in one of his haunts, and gave him to understand that he wished to speak to him alone. In five minutes they were seated in a private room, secure from listeners, and then the housebreaker opened his business. A friend of his, it seemed, a young man of great promise, for whose education he was chiefly responsible, had got into difficulties. It was partly his own fault, no doubt. He had shown a want of calmness and self-possession for which his youth was the only excuse. The enterprise—it was his first—had been well-planned, Andrea himself had been consulted as to the details, and it had to a certain extent been successful. The young robber and his companions had succeeded in forcing their way into the house of a widow, and carrying off her jewels, together with a considerable sum of money ; but they had, unfortunately, in the nervousness of a first attempt, gagged the old lady and her servant in so awkward a manner that, on the following morning, both had been found dead. No one could regret the accident more than the person who had caused it, for he was a tender-hearted man ; but the worst thing was that the murder, as the authorities called it, had excited great attention, and there was reason to believe the police were on the right track. What was to be done ?

“Start a false scent.”

“Yes, but that is not so easy. It is not an affair that any *Picciotto* can be expected to undertake, but a matter of life and death.”

“Is there no one on whom you can put the blame against his will ?” asked Domenico, and there was a strange light in his eye.

“Why, yes, and it was about that I wanted to speak to you. Those two men that you recommended to me some time ago——”



"What men?"

"Carlo and his son—Don't you remember we saw them——"

"Ah, I had almost forgotten. What of them?"

"They are the most worthless dogs I ever met," replied Andrea savagely. "I have done what I could for them because you wished it, but there is not a spark of manliness in them. Yet, somehow, the police honour them with their suspicion; and for the last few months they have watched them more closely than any of us. It would be easy to lay the crime to their door, but of course we should not think of doing so if you objected."

"My dear fellow, one's skin is nearer than one's shirt. I should not scruple to sacrifice a person in whom I took considerable interest for such a friend as you; but the fact is—I surely must have told you so at the time—Don Carlo and his son are old enemies of mine. When I saw them begging at the convent-door I felt a momentary compassion for them. Which of us is not subject to an occasional weakness? But, believe me, I have forgotten them from that day to this; if they can be of any use to you, they are entirely at your service, and, to tell the truth, I believe hanging is the only thing they are good for. But," he added after a pause, "it is better I should not appear in the matter. Il Turco and others who know what once passed between those men and me might think it was hatred to them, and not affection to you, that prompted me, and I have already had my vengeance. So I leave you to settle the details. Only, if I can help you in any way, always apply to me; I will second you to the best of my ability. And if, by the way, your friend should want a few hundred ducats to help him out of his scrape, of course you know where they are to be found. We can reckon again when he happens to have made a good haul."

Andrea parted from Pesce Cane with the strengthened conviction that he was the best and firmest of friends.

From the day on which his slippers had been stolen Don Carlo had suspected his son of the theft, and, though he had not the courage to charge him with it, he had taken precautions to prevent its repetition. The chief of these had been, to lift a tile and scoop a hole in the earth beneath it, under the bed. In this place he secreted the only treasure he still possessed—an old clay pipe with a broken reed stem, which he had long ceased to use, the glass buttons he had cut from his last waistcoat, and whatever *grani* he was able to save. It was the great pleasure of his life to take out these treasures and gloat over them ; but he only ventured to do so when he knew his son was safely sent on a distant errand, and he was particularly proud of the way in which he had learnt to sweep the dust over the place so as to look as if it had fallen there by chance. He was skilful enough to deceive his son, who was not among the number of those who suspected his father of possessing hidden wealth ; but as soon as Andrea visited the room, in the absence of both occupants, his sharp eyes discovered the tile that had been loosened. He knew he was safe, for he had entered the room by the window, after sending its two inhabitants to different ends of the city, and making arrangements that secured their being detained there till the morning ; so he at once opened the treasure-trove. A contemptuous smile hovered over his lips as he inspected the contents, and yet the care with which they had been concealed suggested an idea to him. He replaced the lid and re-adjusted the dust, as carefully as he could, and then loosened a tile in another corner of the room, and made a similar hole under it, placing the earth he had excavated in his handkerchief, and afterwards blowing the dust over the place with his breath.



When the old man returned, he saw that the surroundings of his hiding-place had been disturbed, and was in a fever of excitement until he had got rid of his son ; but, when he found his property was still safe, he concluded that a neighbour's cat had crept into the room and disordered the dust with her tail. He did not even think of looking further, and so the hole which Andrea had made escaped his notice. He seemed to be in luck that day, for during the course of the afternoon a shoemaker who lived next door beat his wife and daughter, and in the evening, when he sallied out, he chanced upon a heavy house-key lying in the street, which he at once sold to a dealer in old iron for several *tornesi*. On his way to the *taverna* he chuckled and rubbed his hands at the thought of the difficulties to which the person who had lost the key would certainly be exposed.

When he reached his destination his spirits were rather damped by finding that his son was in an advanced stage of intoxication, and there was an important errand to do ; but he was too accustomed to discomfort to complain, and, as soon as he had hastily swallowed his supper, he started on his way. He would have gone without eating, but a feeling of compassion made Andrea insist on his finishing a more than usually sumptuous meal, to which he added half a *caraffa* of wine as a present.

"You shall have the other half when you come back," he added in a friendly tone, and the old man, who loved good fare, when he had not to pay for it, trotted off in high spirits.

He was not destined to drink the rest of the wine, however ; for that night he and his son were arrested on a charge of robbery and murder. But before this occurred Andrea had found an opportunity of depositing a number of the widow's less valuable trinkets in the hole he had made in their chamber floor. He concealed his work so carefully that on

their first search the police did not notice that the tile had been loosened ; but he afterwards cursed his own skill, as, if it could not be shown that the prisoners were in possession of any part of the stolen property, the evidence against them was very slight. It was proved, indeed, that the key which Don Carlo had sold was that of the house which had been plundered, and that he and his son were in the service of persons well known to the police ; but what told most seriously against them on their first examination was that, though they positively denied ever having been in gaol before, their backs were found to be seamed with scars, of which they gave only a hesitating, confused, and self-contradictory account, as they were too much afraid of Il Turco to speak the truth. This led the authorities to believe that they had laid their hands on two dangerous characters, but the evidence was obviously far too weak to support the charge brought against them.

In these circumstances Andrea had again recourse to Pesce Cane, who, when he had heard the whole story, and obtained information as to the exact position of the hidden treasures, promised the house-breaker that he would put the matter to rights.

Domenico's whole life was passed in more or less open hostility to the police, but he entertained no personal animosity to that body ; indeed, he was on friendly terms with several of its members. He was perfectly ready to outwit them, of course, and he knew that they would take him into custody at any moment, if they were ordered to do so. But there were matters of business at which it would be foolish for either party to take offence, and there were a number of ways in which they could be of use to each other, without any betrayal of trust, or of self-interest, on either side.

Now it happened that one of these friends of Domenico's had been particularly active in the arrest



of the prisoners, and was therefore especially anxious to bring their guilt home to them. If he failed, it was probable he would be reprimanded, and certain that he would be laughed at, whereas, if he succeeded, his promotion was probable. It is possible, too, that his energies were stimulated by visions of the secret hoard, and, as the thought that the men might possibly be innocent never entered his head, it was natural that he should be ready to adopt any means whatever of bringing them to justice.

Domenico knew all this, and took an opportunity of getting into conversation with him in what seemed quite an accidental way. The policeman's mind was full of the business he had in hand, and he began to talk about it almost at once. When he had finished his story, Domenico said—

"Well, perhaps I might be able to help you in the matter if we could come to terms."

The other was all attention.

"You must keep the strictest silence, and never let any one know that you have obtained your information from me. It must seem as if you had discovered it yourself."

This was just what his companion wanted.

"Then, in case the old man's condemnation should lead to the discovery of his secret wealth, you must give me a third of any part that falls to your share."

The policeman readily agreed to this proposal, and the Camorrist continued—

"I have reason to believe that he has not yet been able to bring the whole of the proceeds of his last robbery into security. A part of them still remains concealed in his room."

"It is impossible; we have searched the place thoroughly."

"Did you look under the tiles, in the corner opposite the door?"

A light suddenly flashed into the other's eyes, and he warmly thanked his friend.

"One good turn deserves another, you know," said Domenico; "perhaps I may have a favour to ask of you some day."

"Whatever it is, I will do it—that is, of course, if it is in my power, and not contrary to the rules of the service."

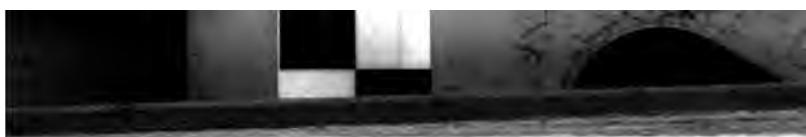
"I know, I know." And so they parted.

Don Carlo's room had been strictly guarded since his arrest, and when, on the following day, a new search was ordered, an official of some rank accompanied the constables who were charged with it. The place was so bare that it seemed impossible that anything should be concealed in it, and the party was just about to retire when the policeman, whose acquaintance we have already made, cried out—

"Look there; is not that tile loose?" And, stooping down, he drew forth the hidden jewels.

Nor was this all the assistance Domenico rendered his friend in securing the conviction of the prisoners. He furnished him with the names and addresses of several of their old masters. These were men of respectability, whose testimony was above suspicion. The first who was called recognised Carlo as a man who had been in his service for about a month or six weeks several years ago, but he was unable to give any further information about him. Why had he been dismissed? The witness tried to avoid answering the question, but, on being pushed, he said that he had had no proof whatever that Carlo had acted dishonestly; but circumstances might raise such a suspicion in a master's mind as rendered it his duty to dismiss a servant, though they would not justify him in bringing a charge against him. It must be remembered that an innkeeper was responsible for his guest's property as well as his own.

The next gave similar evidence, and it told



strongly against the accused, for it seemed highly improbable that the same man should have incurred suspicion in so many different situations if he had given no ground for it.

Even without the additional light thus thrown on their characters, the proofs laid before the judges would have seemed strong enough to justify the condemnation of the prisoners, and sentence of death was duly passed upon Carlo and his son.

The robbery and murder had been so much talked about that considerable surprise was expressed when it became known that the king had resolved to commute the sentence of the convicts for one of imprisonment with hard labour for life. Speculations as to the motives which had led to this act of clemency were rife, but none of them were very satisfactory, and in a week or two the matter ceased to be discussed, and was consequently forgotten.

The two men passed the days on which sentence of death rested on them very differently. Don Carlo sank into an apathy which prevented him from realising the situation in which he was placed ; he sat about in his cell as he had been accustomed to do in the sunshine, and either wept silently or chuckled and rubbed his hands without any apparent cause. His son, on the other hand, displayed the most abject terror. He kissed the feet of his gaolers and implored them to inform the highest officials that there was nothing conceivable that he would not do, if only his life were spared. When he found that his entreaties were vain, he asked for the priest, but the two had hardly been closeted for ten minutes together, before the stout and worthy clergyman hammered at the door with both his fists as emphatically as if the cell had been on fire, and, on its being opened, the penitent followed up his spiritual comforter with such a volley of curses as made even the turnkey lift his eyebrows. Immedi-

ately afterwards he implored his keeper to procure a bottle or two of wine, and to play a game of cards with him. The man was so much affected by the condition of his prisoner that I almost fancy he would have complied with his wishes, even if he had had to pay for the wine out of his own pocket ; but fortunately his virtue was not put to so severe a test, as Andrea had taken care to let all the lower officials of the prison know that they would be duly remunerated for any kindness they might show to the condemned men. It was not therefore long before the wine and the cards were brought. The convict drank greedily, and played as eagerly and falsely as if he had any chance of spending his winnings ; but, after a game or two, he let his hands rest on the cards he was to deal, and suddenly asked : " Where shall I be this day week ? " The question was begun in a light pious tone, but the voice sank as the words followed each other, and then the poor wretch repeated—" Next week—next week," in accents of horror, and buried his face in his pallet, and sobbed and moaned.

When the reprieve was brought, he received the news with frantic joy, and even his father showed a certain amount of satisfaction, for the long, hopeless monotony of prison labour seemed better to both than death. In fact they soon began to feel at home in their new surroundings, and the mind of the old man seemed to revive a little. Their gaolers and companions treated them with less harshness than they were used to, their food was at least as good, and more certain, than that they had eaten for years, and they looked upon the prison walls less as a restraint upon their freedom than as a security against their enemy. Carlo often eyed them with a sigh of relief. He was allowed to do but little, and to sit about in the sun a good deal, for his keepers really felt compassion for his infirmities, and, besides this,



Andrea had compunction enough to do everything in his power to alleviate his victims' sufferings; and that was a good deal more than one would at first have supposed. In fact, the old man would probably have enjoyed his new life thoroughly if he had only had his hoard safely stowed away somewhere within reach. As it was, his mind dwelt on his pipe, his buttons, and the few *grani* he had saved, as on the memory of a lost joy.

It was about six weeks after the day on which the Court had pronounced sentence, when Domenico again sought out the policeman he had befriended, and gave him a sign that he desired a private conversation. As soon as they were alone he began :—

“You promised to do me a favour the other day.”

“And I am perfectly ready to do it now. What is it?”

“I want you to have me imprisoned for a time.”

“That won't be such a difficult matter, will it?” replied the agent of the law, with a smile.

It will not be as easy as it looks. I, of course, wish my own sentence to be short, and yet I must be sent to the same prison as those two men.”

“That is impossible.”

“Yet it must be done, and I will tell you why. You have heard tell of the old man's wealth which is hidden away, nobody knows where. It can be of no use to him where he is, and, if I can only get access to him, I will try if I can't squeeze the secret out of him. Now, I don't want you to help me for nothing. If I succeed, you shall have a third of whatever falls to my share. I have no other partners as yet, but I shall most likely have to take some one in the gaol into my confidence, and he will, of course, expect something.”

“Well, I will see what can be done. If I may explain our purpose to — it can perhaps be managed, a hope of gold will go a long way with him.”

“No, no, let us have as few sharers as possible, but



292 STORIES OF NAPLES AND THE CAMORRA

money will of course be wanted. I will advance it, but expenses will of course have to be deducted before we divide," and he laid one hundred ducats on the table. He had taken them that morning out of Margherita's little box, and they were the very pieces with which Don Carlo had once sought to propitiate his favour.

About ten days later the two convicts were struck with horror by the appearance of Domenico, and well they might be, for it was a sign that their short period of peace had come to an end. Pesce Cane's name was already a power, the gaolers were soon hand and glove with him, and the prisoners vied with each other in efforts to gain his notice, and it was not long before it became known that the best way of securing his favour was to treat Carlo and his son with cruelty and indignity. It grew the fashion to torment them, and those who first began to do so from interested motives continued it for the fun of the thing. At first one of the gaolers held back, and endeavoured to protect at least the old man, but Pesce Cane took him aside, whispered to him some hint of the secret wealth which Don Carlo was said to possess, and convinced him that the only way of discovering its whereabouts was to place its possessor in a position which would render him willing to purchase a respite at any price. The gaoler's sympathy had been founded on pity alone, and it vanished as soon as he began to regard his prisoner as a cunning old miser, instead of a helpless imbecile, and from that moment he became the bitterest of his persecutors. As soon as the thought of the treasure was suggested to him he entertained no doubt of its existence. The property of which the murdered widow had been robbed alone amounted to a considerable sum, and only a small part of it had been recovered. The rest must be somewhere, and where it was there was certain to be more.

It is unnecessary to follow the history of the next three or four months. The younger man was the first to break down under the burden of misery which he had to bear. He took the fever, and his body was too much exhausted by the alternations of excess and want to which it had been exposed to resist the encroachments of the disease.

As soon as Pesce Cane knew that the end was near, he found it easy to secure himself a place in the sick ward ; he lay there, with his eyes fixed on the sick man, all day long, and even at night the patient could not move without attracting the sharp, pitiless eyes. They were a continual torment to him. It is true his mind wandered, but they seemed to pierce his delirious dreams and add a terror to them. On the third morning after Domenico had fallen sick, his enemy had sunk into a torpor which the doctor said would probably last till all was over ; the attendant had left the room, and the only other inhabitant it contained was asleep. The Camorrist slipped out of bed, concealed a little bottle in his shirt sleeve, and crept to the bedside of the dying man. He was breathing weakly and with difficulty, it was evident he had not much longer to live ; would consciousness return before he died ? Domenico took out his bottle ; it contained a cordial which a medical student had given him in reward for some service, and which he now poured into the open mouth of the sleeper. The frame shivered, the hands twitched, the eyes opened. Pesce Cane put his lips to his brother's ear, and whispered in a clear, incisive voice, "Do you remember Margherita ?"

The dying man's face suddenly assumed a look of horror, he fixed his eyes upon vacancy, his limbs trembled, he clenched his fists and was dead.

Domenico had spent almost the whole of his mother-in-law's property before he was sent to prison, and Graziella soon made an end of the little that remained.

She had never been trusted with money before her marriage, and never accustomed to deny herself anything since, and it was natural that, when her husband was taken from her, she should feel the need of a little extra comfort in the way of dress and food. She had no fear of the future, for she was by nature accustomed to live in the present, and the thought of being reduced to real want never entered her mind. So, when her means were nearly exhausted, she applied to the *Contarulo*, or pay-master of the Camorra, without the slightest doubt that her wants would be liberally supplied.

That gentleman received her with great civility, praised her husband warmly, and expressed his hopes of his speedy release ; but, as soon as she spoke of money, his manner changed. He thought it would be well if she were to adopt some means of earning a livelihood for herself ; it was impossible to say how long Pesce Cane might have to remain in prison, and, after all, it was only very little that the Association could do for the wives of such of its members as happened to be in trouble.

Graziella returned to her home with a heavier heart than she had carried from it, and also with a lighter purse, for she could not resist the temptation of eating an ice by the way, and then she happened to see some ribands which were so cheap it would have been a positive waste of money not to buy them. It seemed as if nothing but hunger would cure her of extravagance, but next morning she made a good resolution not to spend a *grano* on anything she did not absolutely need ; it was one of the two days in the week on which she usually visited her husband, and, as she did not need the cakes and tobacco which she generally brought him as a present, she did not buy them.

He looked rather black when he found that the delicacies on which he had reckoned were missing, and hinted, broadly enough, that it was the duty of a wife

to do what she could to comfort her husband when he happened to be in ill-luck. She could see that even the most poorly-dressed of the women round had brought something with them. What would they and his fellow-prisoners think when they heard that his wife, who wore such a pretty necklace, had come empty-handed?

Graziella felt very much ashamed of herself, and began to cry, and then he soothed her, and said that he knew it was only her forgetfulness, and that she would not do it again. It was quite evident to her now that she must not begin her economies by an attack upon her husband's luxuries, but she was afraid to consult him in his present humour as to her own situation; so she went home, and talked it over with the old servant whom she had inherited from her mother.

The good old creature insisted very strongly on the necessity of Graziella's making it a principle to spend as little of the money that remained as possible (though whenever a temptation to transgress the rule presented itself, she was ready with an argument to show that this was a case to which the principle did not apply), but she saw at once that, in the present case, saving would not do, and that they must think of some means of earning a livelihood; so, after some discussion with her mistress, they both arrived at the conclusion that the sale of the mineral waters of Santa Lucia was as light and cheerful a profession as any they could choose. The *Contarulo* approved of the plan, and Pesce Cane made no objection to it; so Graziella soon found herself started in business.

It was rather fun, for the old servant did all the hard work, such as fetching and placing the *mummere*, as the large earthen jars are called, and, as Domenico's wife had always liked to sit at her door and watch what was going on in the street, her calling afforded her an opportunity of indulging in a favourite amuse-

ment. Her vanity, too, was flattered ; for the new water-stall, served by a young, good-looking, and well-dressed woman, soon attracted a large number of male customers ; and, as Graziella was always ready with a jest, she was rarely without one or two attendants, who soon discovered that she did not resent a compliment to her beauty. This conversation was innocent enough at first, for she really loved her husband, and was proud of him, and she knew it would have amused him to see how she played with her admirers and kept them at a distance. But he was removed from her daily life now, and, as the weeks passed by, the impression he had made on her affections and her fears was weakened ; so that at last she hardly thought of him at all, except when she was calculating how it would be possible to procure money for the bi-weekly tribute he exacted. Graziella was not a woman whose heart was likely long to remain empty, and it soon found a number of new tenants. There was not one of her lovers whom she would have preferred to her husband if they had been placed side by side ; but then they were near and he was distant.

Domenico was kept duly informed of all her doings, but he received her as kindly as ever when she visited him, and showed no sign that he entertained the slightest suspicion of her conduct. On one occasion, however, he asked her to bring him a large earthen jar of sulphur-water when next she came, and this new contribution to his comfort became a regular one. Graziella did not mind this, as she had plenty of means of supplying her own wants now. Thus matters went on for some months, and Pesce Cane's vases of sulphur-water became a perfectly familiar sight to every official and inmate of the prison. Every time his wife came to see him she brought a full one and took an empty one back with her. It had happened by mere accident that



the neck of one of these had been broken off, and Domenico had insisted at the time that it should not be replaced by a new one, though the large opening made it difficult for him to drink out of it. One day, when the term of his imprisonment was almost finished, Domenico told his wife to drop a large clasp-knife which he had at home into the broken jar when it was full of water, and so to introduce it into the prison. She would not have dared to disobey him, even if she had suspected danger, which she did not ; so it seemed to her the simplest thing in the world to do as she was bid.

Now it happened that the gaoler who had at first protected Don Carlo was anxious to distinguish himself in some signal way. A superior who disliked him had just been removed, and he trusted that his successor would view his claims, which were founded on long and faithful service, with more favourable eyes, if only he could attract his attention. Domenico was on friendly terms with him, and had his own reasons for desiring his promotion ; so, as soon as his wife was gone, he asked him : "What would you give to discover some one in the very act of smuggling arms into the prison ?"

The man was taken aback, but answered in a moment, "Whatever I could."

"Well, I don't want anything just now, but I don't mind giving you credit. I shall expect to be paid for my news some day."

"Whenever you like."

"You had better just cast a glance into the jar of sulphur-water my wife brings next time she comes."

The hint was quite sufficient. On her next visit Graziella was politely requested to step into a private room ; she was searched, the jar emptied, and the knife discovered. An order for her arrest was immediately procured, and in due course she was tried

and condemned on a charge of having endeavoured surreptitiously to introduce arms into a gaol.¹

And here she vanishes from our story. On his release Pesce Cane took care to let her hear that he was not entirely disconsolate for her loss ; but he took no further vengeance on her ; indeed, he is said to have used his influence to render her punishment as light as possible. It is certain that, after her retirement was over, he did not molest her in any way, but allowed her to live how and where she liked, on condition of her not interfering with or annoying him. In later years the two met not unfrequently, and in no unfriendly spirit, and to her very end Graziella was accustomed to boast that she had been Pesce Cane's wife, and to relate, not without pride in his genius, the clever way he had invented of punishing her infidelity.

Il Turco approved of his son's conduct in this respect, though he could not understand it in a man who was otherwise so addicted to revenge. For my own part I am inclined to think that Domenico, who had spent his wife's property, and was growing tired of her person, was rather glad to find a good excuse for resuming his own freedom, and that even the revenge he took was a tribute to class prejudice rather than the outcome of any strong personal feeling.

Domenico's chief reason for desiring the gaoler's promotion was that he felt he could leave Don Carlo safely to his care. The man's greed had been awakened, and, as the Camorrist knew it could not be satisfied, he had little fear that the prisoner would be treated with lenity, even when he was not there to watch over him. The old man displayed a wonderful tenacity of life ; his growing imbecility probably pre-

¹ This incident is taken from a paper, "Il Camorrista e la Camorra," contributed by Cav. Carlo Tito Dalbono, to a work entitled, *Usi e costumi di Napoli e contorni descritti e dipinti*.

vented him from feeling the greater part of the misery to which he was exposed, for since his son's death he had sunk more and more into himself. But he had still periods of perfect consciousness during which he fully realised his situation, and others in which certain passages of the past were perfectly clear to him. Even in his most absent moods the mere mention of Pesce Cane's name, or the tone of his voice, brought a look of terror into his face.

The last interview between the two men was a striking one. It was in the hour of recreation. The prisoner caught the Camorrist's eye and turned to flee from it, but then, as if by a sudden impulse, he threw himself on the ground before him, clasped his knees and kissed his feet. One glance of Pesce Cane's cleared the place. No one was bold enough to attempt to listen, though many would literally have given their ears to hear the conversation.

"Don Carlo," Domenico began, in a low and almost gentle voice.

The old man lifted his eyes from the ground and fixed them on those of his enemy. They were still dim, uncertain, and without self-possession.

"Do you remember the old *taverna*, the hearth where you used to cook the sardines and the little birds, the seat where Donna Anastasia used to sit close beside it, the short tables that stood at the side, and the long one in the middle of the room?"

The old man's face brightened as each particular was named, and he made a sign of assent.

"You had two sons. Tore died the other day; he has gone to hell; but where is Carlo?"

The wretch writhed at the words which followed Tore's name, as if he had been pierced with a sharp inward pain.

"Look me in the face," Domenico continued, in a tone that was still low, but more imperative than before.

The man obeyed, but there was a new perplexity in his eyes.

"Where is Carlo?"

"I don't know; he took the money and went away. He had it all; why does he come to me at nights with the long knife?"

It was necessary to soothe him.

"You remember the counter on which the meat used to stand? No one could cook pork chops so well as you did."

Don Carlo nodded.

"And then the baby in the cradle, you remember how you used to pinch and run pins into it as soon as your wife's back was turned."

"Yes, yes," chuckled Don Carlo, "but you mustn't tell her."

"And Margherita, do you remember her, and what you did to her?"

The withered face was distorted with terror, but the eyes for the first time assumed a look of intelligence.

"Well, I am Domenico, and I remember it. You have suffered a good deal since then, and you have much more to suffer. You will never have a moment's peace; as long as you live you are in my hands, and as soon as you die you will fall into the hands of God; and God remembers it too."

With these words Pesce Cane kicked the suppliant away from his feet, and Don Carlo rolled over and over in the dust, in a way which excited the laughter of the prisoners at the other end of the court.

On the following day Domenico was released.

"I dare say I shall be back again soon," was his parting greeting to his friends.

Don Carlo heard it, but he felt neither joy at his persecutor's temporary absence, nor fear at the prospect of his return. His strength seemed entirely broken now, for, as soon as his tormentors left him

alone for a minute, he fell into a kind of wakeful doze. At such times he sat or stood with his eyes fixed on the ground, and kept repeating, "God remembers it; God remembers it."

In fact he had little reason to rejoice at Pesce Cane's departure, for his old friend the gaoler, who was now advanced to a more responsible position, fully supplied his place. He looked upon his prisoner's refusal to reveal the place in which he had concealed his fabulous wealth as a personal injury to himself, and made his days and nights one round of varied suffering. At last, however, it occurred to him that he might possibly succeed in attaining his end by gentleness. So he allowed him to remain in the sick ward, sent him food and wine from his own table, and spoke to him only in the friendliest words and tones. Under this new system of treatment Don Carlo's mind began to revive a little, and the gaoler, who firmly believed that his imbecility was nothing but cunning, considered this a symptom favourable to his hopes. So, one day, when the patient was basking in the sunshine outside the door of the hospital, he seated himself beside him.

"It's pleasanter to lie here quietly in the sunshine, isn't it, than to have to work all day long?"

The old man nodded.

"And then there's nobody to tease you here, is there?"

Don Carlo lifted his chin in the way that signifies "No."

"And you have had nice food."

"I like sardines and little birds best, but they must be well cooked."

"Do you? You shall have them to-morrow, and you shall always live up here, and never be troubled by those rough men again, if you will only behave cleverly, and do one thing that I want."

"What is it?"

"Tell me where you have hidden your treasure."

"My treasure?" The eyes were so blank that the gaoler began to think it possible his mind might really wander at times. "You know you used to hide things away—money, and such like."

The old man's eyes brightened. He remembered his little hoard; it was the pleasantest thought that had come to him since his interview with Domenico. "Yes, yes," he said, "I was afraid of Tore, but he couldn't find the hole," and once more Don Carlo chuckled and rubbed his hands. In a minute more, however, his tone changed, and he said in a plaintive voice: "I can't get at it now."

"No, no, but I can; tell me where it is."

"You would take it away."

"But what good can it do you now? even if you had the money, you could not spend it."

"I don't want to spend it, it mustn't be spent," cried Don Carlo passionately. "I only want to see it, and to touch it."

"Well, what will you give me if I fetch it, and hide it safely in my room, and let you come and see it as often as you like?"

"You might have half the money if you left me all the buttons," suggested the prisoner doubtfully.

"Well, as I'm rather sorry for you, I don't mind fetching it at that rate," said the gaoler, who reflected that, if once the treasure were safely deposited in his room, there would be no one to claim it after the old man's death. "Where is it?"

"Under my old bed, the third tile from the foot, on the back line. You must lift it carefully, or you will break the pipe."

Don Carlo had a good time of it for the next three weeks. His keeper revelled in dreams of unbounded wealth, and he was not ungrateful to the man by whose diligence and secrecy he had been placed in a position to attain the end of his desires. He insisted

on having sardines and little birds every day for dinner, and a plateful of such duly wandered into the sick ward. Don Carlo was happy, but by no means satisfied. Every time he could get his keeper into a corner he asked him eagerly, "Have you got it yet? Is it come?" And the negative answer that always followed seemed to depress him. The gaoler was, in truth, almost as impatient, for the room was at present occupied by a family, who had to be warned and turned out before he could begin to dig. But he found a certain relaxation in inspecting a number of carriages, one of which he thought he should be in a position to buy in a month or so, a silk dress or two for his wife, and a complete hunting costume for himself.

The end of the month came at last, and the room was duly consigned to the gaoler, who had taken it at a far higher rent than it had ever brought before. On the very first evening of his tenancy he resolved to feast his eyes with the sight of the wealth which he now considered his own. He would not, of course, be able to remove it at present. That must be done gradually, and so as not to attract attention, but he would at least look at it, and form some estimate of its value. The tile was easily found; yes, it was loose; he lifted it, and when he saw the worthless heap it contained he was struck with consternation. A moment's reflection, however, convinced him that this was only a part of the old man's cunning, who had doubtless placed these articles about his true hoard in order to divert a further search. In five minutes more the bed was pulled from its place, the tiles beneath it were removed, and the gaoler had begun to dig. He continued to labour eagerly for a long time; indeed, it was not till morning had begun to dawn that he finally came to the conclusion that his prisoner had made a fool of him.

A few hours later he found the old man seated in a sunny nook alone.

"Have you got it?" he asked eagerly. The gaoler seized him by the back of the neck, beat and kicked him violently, and sent him off to work with the rest.

That was the last of Don Carlo's misfortunes. Next morning he was evidently too ill to rise, and before the end of the week he passed away, with "God remembers it," upon his lips.

On the very day on which Domenico was informed of his death, he took all the money that was left in Margherita's box, and paid a visit to Don Diodato. The priest, who knew him by sight, and had heard many stories about him, was more surprised than pleased by his visit. He received him coldly, and asked him, rather shortly, what he wanted.

"I have come to consult you on a religious matter."

"Why do you not go to your parish priest?"

"Because it is of the utmost importance to me, and I have more confidence in you than in him."

Don Diodato was silent for a moment. He felt the greatest repugnance to his visitor, but he did not see how he could get rid of him. Domenico noticed his hesitation, and he continued eagerly—

"It is a thing that any priest can do, that no priest with a conscience can hesitate about. It is to see that masses are duly read for the repose of the soul of a dead child."

There was something in the tone in which the last words were spoken that touched the priest, and the request was the very last which he would have expected Pesce Cane to make; so he replied, much more kindly than before—

"Of course I will do that, if you wish it."

"Thank you, father," said Domenico, and he laid the money on the table. It was a considerable sum.

"And how do you wish the masses to be read?"

"I want everything to be done that can bring her rest, but as little show as possible to be made. You know what is best. I leave it entirely to you."

Don Diodato was beginning to be interested. "How old was the child when she died?" he asked.

"Twelve years and three months."

"And how long is it since her death?"

"Nearly ten years."

"It is a long time; have you had any masses said for her before?"

"No, father. She had suffered a great wrong, and I wanted her to know that I had avenged it. When she is once in heaven, she will forget all about me."

Pesce Cane had a considerable command over his feelings, but there was a tremor in his voice as he spoke the last words. The priest noticed it, and his repugnance to his visitor quite vanished.

"You must have loved this little girl very much, since you have remembered her so long. Tell me, my son"—and the voice became very low, and full of sympathy—"did you lead her into sin?"

"I do not quite know, but I fear so; we were children then, and did not know what we were about. I have been thinking it over lately, and I almost fancy we must have vexed the saints, and that is why they let so great a wretchedness come upon her. And yet it was all my fault, not hers."

"Tell me the whole story. I will consider your confidence as sacred, as if your words were spoken in the Confessional."

Domenico told him how he and his sister had been used to obtain money by exhibiting pictures of the saints. It was wrong, of course, but Don Diodato was surprised that a matter comparatively so small should weigh upon the conscience of a man whom he had always regarded as a hardened criminal. After a few words on the subject, which were doubtless

exceedingly proper, if not very deeply felt, he added in quite a different tone:—

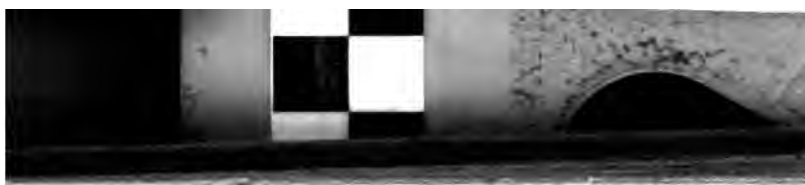
“But, my son, I fear you have been guilty of greater sins since then.”

I did not come to consult you as to my own state, but to ask you to pray for my sister’s soul,” Domenico replied, as he rose to go. “You have undertaken the office, and I have no doubt whatever that you will perform it faithfully. Do you think it was easy for me to come to you?” he added, in a different voice. “I know well enough where my future place must be, and I do not think Margherita could be happy even in Heaven if she were to think about it; so I suppose she will have to forget me quite. She was the only person I ever loved, or who really loved me, and now I have begged you to pray that we may be parted for ever.”

The priest endeavoured to detain him; but he broke away. At the door, however, he paused, and said, “Father, you have been kind to me, and I have treated you rudely. Pardon me, and do not fancy I have no affection for you, or God, or His Church. I know you are a good man, and, if I can serve you in any way, let me know and I will do it. And, if I never go to mass, it is because I will not mock Him by asking Him to forgive my trespasses as I forgive those that trespass against me. For I never forgive my enemies.”

IV

Such had been the earlier life of the man whose bitter resentment Don Antonio had incurred, and his later years had been in keeping with it. And yet, what right have I to say that such a sketch as this can give a true picture of his life? In telling a story



one is obliged to dwell upon the feelings and incidents that lead up to the catastrophe, whereas we all know that in the real world the greater part of our passions and actions have led nowhere, although they were as deeply felt while they lasted, and were as genuine an expression of our character, as those which have determined the course of coming years. Thus, even while Don Carlo and his son were still alive, it was only the smallest part of Domenico's attention that was occupied by them. He was known among his associates as the best of comrades, a man who was never prone to take offence and always ready to do a kind action. And it was not only to those whose help he needed, or whose anger he had to dread, that he showed himself helpful. He was constitutionally good-natured and inclined to promote the happiness of every one who was evidently weaker than himself, or who showed no wish to oppose his will. Thus he was remarkably gentle to old people and to children, and it was a strange sight for those who knew how fatal his wrath, and how relentless his hatred, could be to see him holding a baby in his arms and letting it tug at his watch-chain or play with the handle of his knife. He was the friend of all the ragged little boys and girls in the quarters he frequented; he gave them coppers and bought them fruit and sweetmeats, and seemed more afraid of the childish threat, "Then I will not love you any more," than of anything else in the world. But what struck his companions far more was the fact that he never behaved roughly to any woman. It is true that his greatest temptation to do so was removed by his separation from Graziella; but a man in Pesce Cane's position has innumerable opportunities of losing his temper with his landlady, his laundress, and others of the less attractive members of the female sex, and, somehow, he never took advantage of any of these. His charities were large,

too, and, what is more, they were unwearying. When he had once taken any one up, he did not grow impatient to find that his hunger returned day by day, or that his gratitude decreased as his dread of hunger lessened. All these things—though, as far as I can see, they had no effect whatever on the events which have induced me to attempt to sketch his life—I think it right to mention, as they throw a certain light on a rather unusual character.

For the same reason, I here insert an incident which has nothing to do with the rest of the story. One day, when he was passing down the street which led to the *taverna* where he usually dined, a woman staggered out of one of the houses and caught hold of his arm.

"You must come with me," she said, "I want to speak with you." She was a pale, haggard, bony woman; but he noticed at once that she was very ill, and did as she bade him. She was so exhausted that, when they reached her room, she had to sit still for a minute or two without speaking. Then she rose and went to the bed-side, and, pulling down the coverlet, she pointed to a little girl of three that was sleeping there.

Domenico smiled as he bent over it, and recognised one of the children who used to follow him about.

"Pesce Cane," the woman said, "you are not a good man, and I have been a bad woman, but I am dying now. Will you take care of the child?"

The request was unexpected, and the Camorrist might easily have found a dozen good excuses for refusing it, but he sought for none, he was accustomed to act on the impulse of the moment, and his pity was excited. He at once undertook the strange charge.

"But you must promise me," the mother continued, grasping his hand passionately, "you must promise me she shall never grow to be what I have been."

"I will do my utmost to prevent it." And he kept



his word. He placed the child in a respectable family in a distant part of the city, paid liberally for her nurture, and went to see her twice or thrice every week. These visits were little Carmela's holidays, for she clung with a strange affection to Domenico, whom she had now learnt to call her father, as indeed everybody in the neighbourhood supposed him to be ; and he, too, soon began to look forward to them as the pleasantest passages in his life.

The good woman to whom the child had been entrusted was not content with keeping her neat and clean and feeding her well. She desired to do her best for her in every way, and above all things to teach her her duty and make her anxious to perform it ; and, as she herself was a pious woman, she could think of no better form of instruction than telling her stories out of the New Testament and the lives of the Saints.

The child was fond of these tales, and loved to repeat them to Domenico, and he, who never wearied of her prattle, would sit and listen to them with strangely mixed feelings, in which sometimes memories of his own childhood and Margherita, and sometimes a sense that he was faithfully fulfilling his trust, predominated. He entertained no doubt of the truth of the narratives, but he never thought of bringing them into connection with his own later life. They were a part of his intercourse with Carmela, which from the first he had kept carefully concealed from his comrades. He seemed to enter a new world and put on another nature whenever he came into the presence of the child. When she was about five years old he was called away from Naples for a week or ten days. In this interval Carmela learnt her first prayers, and on his return she was anxious that he should hear her say them.

"But you must sit down and take off your cap, you know."

Domenico did as he was bidden, and the child, kneeling at his feet, and leaning her arms upon his knees, repeated the Lord's Prayer and the Hail, Mary. After that day she always used to say her prayers in the same way before they parted.

In a few years, however, this intercourse between the girl and her guardian came to an end. It was necessary to do something more for her education, and Domenico and the woman who had hitherto acted as mother to her agreed that the best thing would be to send her as a boarder to a neighbouring nunnery. After this had been done his opportunities of seeing her became few and rare, and after the first one or two she ceased to greet him with the old warmth. In a year or so more she began to feel shy and constrained in his presence, and to seem almost glad when the time had come for them to part. It was quite right and natural that it should be so, he supposed ; at least it was a sign that Carmela was happy and quite absorbed in her new pursuits, and that surely was a good thing. Yet it hurt him more than he liked to acknowledge, for he missed the hours of innocent converse with her, which formed almost the only part of the past on which his memory could dwell without any bitterness. Well, he had at least kept his promise to her dying mother, and, after all, it was only for a time that he was separated from the girl. When her education was finished he would place her in a family of a somewhat higher position than that in which she had been before. There he would have constant access to her, and she would soon learn to love him again. In a few years she would marry a well-to-do tradesman—for Domenico had already laid aside a sum which would seem a considerable dowry for one of that class—and then he would always be a welcome guest in her home, and play with her children, as he used to play with her. By degrees, perhaps, he might even retire from



the more lawless part of his profession, and drop the wildest of his associates, and have a quiet and peaceful old age. Such anticipations as these were no good resolutions ; they were only castles in the air, which he amused himself with building during his idle hours.

But Carmela's day-dreams were of a very different cast. She knew she ought to feel gratitude and affection for her protector, who was, perhaps, also her father ; but in truth she regarded him with something very like terror. She had begun by being ashamed of his coarse look, his vulgar manners, and his broad Neapolitan dialect, which were so strongly at variance with everything she was taught to think nice and proper ; but in the course of time she had come to fear that he was something worse than an ill-bred man. How the suspicion that he might belong to the criminal classes first arose in her mind she could not recollect ; at times she was inclined to think that it had gradually and unconsciously forced itself upon her, and then, again, it would seem to her a dim memory which had clung to her from her earliest childhood ; but, if the latter were indeed the case, the image of the bold, lawless robber, it might be murderer, had looked very different to the romping child of seven from what it did to the demure maiden of almost seventeen years. It was true that this man, however the rest of his life was passed, had always been gentle and kind to her ; that was a claim on all the gratitude she had to give ; but, still, she shuddered at the thought of having to be constantly in his company, and, still more, of being married, as she supposed she should be, to one of his associates. Anything would be better than that. Ah, if she could only remain where she was—if she might only be a nun ! It was natural that her teachers should encourage such thoughts. They knew who Pesce Cane was, and, whether they believed his positive

assertion that he was not Carmela's father or no, they could hardly conceive of a worse guardian for a young girl. If he had followed the example of many parents, and brought some such lover as he himself contemplated to make the acquaintance of their pupil in the convent, they might have acted differently ; but Domenico wished to give his ward a chance of seeing and choosing for herself.

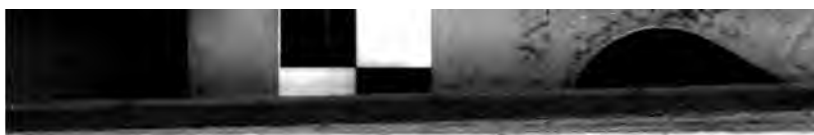
When she first found courage to mention to him her wish to take the veil, he scouted the idea. The plan was too different from all his own dreams not to appear quite impracticable at the moment. But, on second thoughts, he did not feel so certain that she was wrong. He had seen too much of the world to think that the most foolish thing a woman can do is to resign it entirely. And then, they said such wishes came from God. How if he were to oppose her now, and she were to go wrong afterwards?—and no one can say that a woman may not go wrong.

Domenico was in doubt. So he went to consult the woman to whom he had first consigned Carmela, and to whom he felt himself united by the love they both bore the girl. Her first words decided him.

"This is a sad thing for you," she said, as soon as he had told the story ; "a good daughter is a great comfort to a man when he grows old. But for her, doubtless, it is the best thing, since she has the call."

Domenico at once felt that the woman was right. It was for his own future, and not for that of Carmela, that he had been so vexed and anxious. He had not been conscious of it before, and, now that it had become clear to him, his mind was at once made up. So, in due time, the money he had saved for his ward's dowry was paid over to the convent, and Carmela became a nun.

Pesce Cane's old comrades had for years been whispering to each other that he was growing old. His strength and agility, it is true, had shown no



signs of decay, and his resolution was as strong as ever; but he had begun to betray an aversion to their amusements, and even an inclination to withdraw from their more criminal undertakings. Now they loudly declared that he had regained his youth, for he showed himself as reckless in his enterprises and his pleasures as he had been at twenty.

Il Turco lived to see this rehabilitation of his son's character, and it greatly delighted the old man, who had not known what to make of the listlessness Domenico had displayed. He did not, however, long enjoy this renewed pride in the valour of his offspring, as he was suddenly taken ill, and died in three days' time. It is needless to say that Domenico watched beside his sick bed, and tended him with the greatest care and affection. His last words were the joyous exclamation—"Yes, my boy, yes! swords are trumps."¹

But we will return to Domenico's encounter with Don Antonio in the tavern parlour.² Domenico was vexed at having to give back the fish, for he had set his heart upon distinguishing the first day of his return to Naples by some daring action, and now he knew he was more likely to be ridiculed than admired for what he had done. And, besides, he felt he had suffered wrong: for he was fully convinced that the fact that the basket contained fish belonging to a man who paid no duty to the Camorra rendered the whole lot fair prey. It was by no means the first difference of opinion of the kind which he had had with Don Antonio. He was inclined to consider all arrangements by which the protection of the Camorra was secured as so many concessions, which were perhaps at times necessary, but ought always to be construed in the strictest legal sense. His superior, who preferred the regular revenue derived from willing con-

¹ Swords are a suit in the Italian game of cards.

² Page 230.

tributions to the results obtained by threats and plunder, was inclined to interpret them more liberally, and, as he was the superior, he generally managed to carry out his views, much to his opponent's disgust.

Pesce Cane, however, soon managed to redeem any reputation he might have lost by his restoration of the fish. He seemed to have become bolder than ever in planning his enterprises, and more cunning in carrying them out. The consequences were that, in the first place, he became possessed of a large amount of booty, and, in the second, he was again consigned to the *domicilio coatto* at the end of five months, though nothing definite could be proved against him. This time, however, it was Ischia that was appointed his place of residence. He remained there for about a year and a half, and rather enjoyed his exile.

He was in high spirits on his return, and fully determined to recommence his old courses; but on the following day his resolution suddenly changed. He was sauntering down the Toledo when he met a man whose face he knew, though he had not seen it for many years. The object of his curiosity appeared to be a gentleman—at least, he was dressed in scrupulous accordance with the newest fashion. He wore dainty boots and closely fitting gloves, and carried a thin and elegant walking stick. Any impartial spectator would have thought him nearly ten years younger than Domenico, and yet have remarked that his dress was a shade too youthful for his years; but Pesce Cane recognised him at once as Don Carlo's elder son.

It would be tiresome to record all the steps which Domenico took for the purpose of obtaining information with respect to the man who had so unexpectedly reappeared; suffice it to say that in a week he was in possession of the following facts. His step-brother went by the name of Don Giorgio, and had arrived in Naples some six months before,

with a letter of credit for a considerable sum to one of the chief banks, and with introductions which secured him admittance to good society—not, it is true, to that exclusive circle which includes most of the highest and oldest families, and which is understood to be Bourbonistic and clerical in its sympathies, but to the balls and banquets which are chronicled in Liberal newspapers, and to the families of those who at the time believed they had a hope of being appointed to some political or municipal office, as soon as a turn of the administrative wheel brought their party into power. Among these, he was particularly intimate with Don Eugenio, a man of good family and violent opinions, who had just completed his twenty-sixth year. Report said that Don Giorgio was particular in his attentions to the step-sister of his friend, Donna Elvira, who was about thirty-four years of age. She was the only child of her father's first marriage; her mother had been an American lady, and on his death she had inherited the whole of her fortune.

Eugenio was also well provided for, though not so well as his sister, and she contributed more than her share to the support of the establishment that bore his name. His great ambition was to play a part in politics, and that was probably what first brought him into a more intimate connection with Don Giorgio, who was said to have considerable skill in conducting elections, and consequently had no small influence with his party. It was supposed to be for political reasons that the elder man had sought the acquaintance of Don Antonio; at any rate, it was certain that the two had been frequently seen together.

Such was the substance of the information which Pesce Cane was able to obtain, but we may add one or two particulars. It must not be supposed that Don Giorgio's present companions mistook him for a gentleman, or regarded him with any great personal

affection. They did neither ; but they looked upon him as a man who was likely to get on in the political world, and as one who could be of great use both to themselves and to their party. They therefore sought to secure and recompense his services by a number of social civilities, which in fact meant nothing. It was only Don Eugenio who admitted him to anything approaching intimacy, and he had his own reasons for doing so. In the first place, he was more eager than most of his associates to obtain Don Giorgio's support, and in the second, he had received positive commands from his sister to treat him with consideration ; and he was too well acquainted, both with the warmth of her temper and with the strength of her will, not to acquiesce in any of her reasonable wishes. He saw very well where matters were tending, and Don Giorgio was not the man whom he would have chosen for a brother-in-law ; but then, his sister was old enough to choose for herself, and, if she made a mistake, he had not the slightest power of balking her inclinations. It was better for him to put as good a face as he could on an affair he did not quite like, and there were certain considerations that rendered it easier for him to do so than it might otherwise have been. For his own part, at least, he would be no loser by Elvira's marriage, as, in case of her dying without children, the whole of her property was to revert to certain American cousins of hers, whom he had never seen, and for whom it was only natural that he should not feel any very passionate affection. On the other hand, her husband would naturally be anxious to further his plans ; and he knew he could rely upon his sister, who had a strong liking for him, of a somewhat harsh and imperious kind, both to keep apartments for him in any palace she might take, either in Rome or elsewhere, and to push his interests by every means in her power.

Donna Elviraherself was not in the least in love

with Don Giorgio ; she saw as well as everybody else that he was vain and ill-bred, and she strongly suspected him of being false and selfish. But whatever passion her nature was capable of had burnt out long ago, and she knew that at her age, if she intended to marry, she must not be fastidious in her choice. There were doubtless old men of unexceptionable birth and breeding who would willingly have called her income their own, and young men with similar advantages had often given proof of a similar inclination. But she was not without a certain ambition. People said that Don Giorgio was sure to play a part in the world, and she preferred the thought of having her *salon* filled with men of consequence in active life to associating with the most polite and highly-polished nonentities. As to the faults of Don Giorgio's character, she did not think much about them ; she had never yet met a person who could subdue her, and she did not think he was the man who would be likely to do so, particularly as her fortune was closely tied up. In a matter of such importance, however, it was of course necessary to act with prudence ; she must hear something more about her suitor's past life and his prospects before she took any decisive step. So she kept him in constant suspense, growing gracious whenever he seemed inclined to break away from her, and cool as soon as his ardour rekindled.

Things stood thus when, one evening, Don Eugenio was invited to a house in a distant part of the city. Politics had led him into a number of strange acquaintances, and he did not quite like his servants to know how familiar he had grown with a number of persons whom, radical as he was, he felt to be beneath him ; so he left home on foot, and afterwards made use of a cab. On his return, he was glad to find a two-horse vehicle while sauntering homewards, and at once engaged it. He flung himself into the

back seat, and soon was too absorbed in his thoughts to notice the direction the driver was taking. He was irritated and tired, though it was still early; this society did not suit him, it was certainly less agreeable than that to which he had been used from his childhood; but then, perhaps Don Giorgio was right in saying it was necessary for him to frequent it if he desired to obtain political influence. And yet other people of his class with similar aims did not do so, but contented themselves with drinking success to the social revolution in the choicest wine and the most select company. His own father had been the most exclusive of men, and yet, aristocrat and reactionary as he was, what an influence he had exercised on the lower classes! "On the lower, yes, but not on the middle class, who have the votes to give," Don Giorgio had replied, when he argued the question with him: well, that was another thing in favour of a sweeping reform bill, which would enable gentlemen to take their proper place in parliament without obliging them to mix in such very disagreeable society.

His reflections had reached this point, when the carriage suddenly stopped, and the door was opened by a man who stood beside it. It was Domenico, but his most intimate friend would hardly have recognised him in the disguise he had assumed. He bowed with the greatest politeness, and said:—

"Excuse me, Don Eugenio, for my want of ceremony in stopping your carriage, but I desire an interview with you, and could find no other way of securing one."

"What can I do for you?" asked the young man, who was glad to remember that his purse did not contain more than twenty lire.

"For me? Nothing; but your father once did me a very important favour, and I now wish to do you a service in return."



"I am much obliged to you, I am sure ; what is it ?"

"We cannot talk here without exciting attention ; will you get out, and walk up and down with me for ten minutes ?" The carriage can wait at the corner."

Don Eugenio looked out. They were in a lonely, ill-lighted street that was entirely unknown to him.

Domenico noticed his hesitation. "If you prefer it," he said, "and will allow me to enter with you, the coachman can drive on. In three minutes we shall be in the Mercato, and then he can take the most frequented ways. I know the night air is said to be unwholesome in this part of the town."

Don Eugenio at once consented, and his strange companion, turning to the driver, said in a different tone :—

"Drive as quickly as you can to the Mercato, slowly along the harbour to San Carlo, and, if we have not stopped you first, up the Toledo."

Then he took his place on a front seat, shut the door, drew the blinds, and, taking a knife out of his pocket, gave it to his companion, saying : "On my word of honour, that is the only weapon I have about me ; you had better keep it till we part."

The younger man instinctively grasped the knife ; but in a moment he felt he was wrong to do so. He was so entirely in the power of the man before him that it would have been wiser, as well as more polite, to have pretended to show him perfect confidence. Still, the incident somewhat allayed his anxiety, and, as a glance through the window showed him they had already reached the Mercato, and that the coachman was really obeying the orders he had heard, he became comparatively calm.

"What is it you have to tell me ?" he asked.

"I shall have to speak both of your family matters and of secrets of great importance to myself. I know I can trust your honour not to betray the latter."

Don Eugenio bowed.

"And, as to the former, I must beg you to listen patiently till I have come to the end of what I have to say. If you do so, you will see that it is not mere impertinence that induces me to meddle with matters which you may at first very naturally be inclined to think no business of mine."

Don Eugenio again bent his head. The streets through which they were now passing were so well lighted that each of the men could distinctly see every movement made by the other.

"You have become very intimate with Don Giorgio of late. What do you know about him?"

"I thought you wished to make some communication to me, not to ask me questions."

"They say he is going to marry Donna Elvira."

"I really see no good purpose that can be served by our discussing such gossip. Old maids must have something to talk about. If a match is not being made under their eyes, they like to invent one, and the more improbable it is the more amusing they find it."

"It was not as a piece of mere gossip that I heard of it. Don Giorgio makes a boast of it whenever he is in society you are not likely to enter; but, if it is an empty boast, I can only beg you to set me down at once, and humbly apologise for having thrust myself upon you. My intentions, at least, were good. I could not bear to think that my benefactor's daughter should marry such a man without receiving a timely warning."

Don Eugenio was silent, but he made no effort to stop the carriage.

"What do you know about Don Giorgio?" Domenico repeated.

"And you?"

"I know he is an escaped convict."

The younger man was taken quite aback. He had



expected to hear something unpleasant, but nothing so bad as this. After a pause, his companion continued: "He was condemned under the Bourbons"—there was a sigh of relief from the other side of the carriage—"to hard labour for life, for a brutal outrage upon a child. The girl died in consequence."

For more than two minutes neither of the occupants of the carriage spoke. Don Eugenio at first found it impossible to command either his thoughts or his voice. At last he said, in a rather uncertain tone: "The report that my sister is betrothed to him is untrue; but, if he is such a man as you say, I am sorry I ever had anything to do with him. But, after all, he has been received everywhere, at least in our circle; are you ready to repeat the story to his face?"

"I met him in prison," was the reply, "I am still in hiding, and it has been at great risk to myself that I have sought you out."

Don Eugenio had started at the first words; his companion had noticed it, and continued: "Of course you think that a reason for not believing me. You rich people who have no temptation to break the laws can never conceive that a poor man who has done so—who has been wild, and perhaps dishonest—may still retain a feeling of gratitude. Your father thought differently. Well, I have done my best to pay my debt, and, after all, it is your affair, not mine."

They had now reached the end of the Toledo, and the coachman paused for further orders. The nobleman put his head out of the window and bade him drive back again. As soon as he had resumed his seat, he said: "Pardon me; I am not ungrateful to you, but you can hardly expect me to believe such a tale without any proof. Don Giorgio brought good letters of introduction with him."

"I know nothing about that—were any of them addressed to you?"

"No, but to several of my acquaintances ; and then he is evidently wealthy, he lives in good style."

"Upon credit."

"But how does he obtain the credit?"

"By means of you."

"Of me?"

"Yes, by saying he is engaged to your sister. I do not know what induced you to spend this evening where you did, but I know why he took you there."

"Why?"

"To confirm the story. He knows that everybody will say you would not mix in such society unless you had some special reason for doing so."

Don Eugenio bit his lip.

"But you are right to ask for proofs," Domenico continued. "So many years have passed that it is just possible I may be mistaken in the face. If he is the man I mean, his back must still bear the signature of the lash."

"In that case he will certainly take care to keep it hidden."

"That is true. Let me see—let me see— You might perhaps introduce the subject of flogging, by chance, or let fall the names of Il Turco and Pesce Cane—those were the nicknames of two men with whom he had a good deal to do at one time. If you keep your eyes sharply on him it will be strange if he does not show some confusion at hearing them from your lips. And now I believe I have told you all I can, and so, with your leave, I will bid you good-night."

"I am sincerely obliged to you. Shall I not put you down where I took you up?"

"No, thank you, that corner will do as well, if you will return my knife."

Don Eugenio at once did so, with a smile, and stopped the carriage. As soon as he had set his foot

upon the ground, however, Domenico again turned to him, as if he suddenly remembered himself.

"After all, the person of whom we have been speaking may be rich. He was always cunning, and such men get on. He has certainly a letter of credit for a considerable amount; but they say that is a mere feint, and that he has not drawn a lira, but lived entirely on credit for the last month and a half. All that is mere hearsay, however; I have told you what I really know." The next moment Domenico had vanished.

On the following morning Don Eugenio had a long conversation with his sister. He did not feel justified in entering into any details with respect either to the character of his informant or the story itself; he merely told her he had heard something to Don Giorgio's disadvantage, something so bad that, if it were true, it would be impossible for them to continue to associate with him. The matter had been communicated to him in confidence, and they had admitted Don Giorgio to such intimacy that it would obviously be wise for them to keep it as quiet as possible. The brother added that he believed he held in his hands the means of testing the truth of the tale.

Donna Elvira received the news very quietly. "I have sometimes thought there must be something dark in the man's past, and that has made me very careful," she said. "He has not the slightest hold upon me. But cannot you at least give me a hint as to what is said against him?"

"I am told that he has been imprisoned on a criminal charge, but perhaps the tale may not be true."

"That, of course, would settle matters at once. My dear brother, I have perfect confidence in you, and leave the affair entirely in your hands."

It was agreed that Don Giorgio should be put to

the test at the very earliest opportunity, but that till then neither of them should betray any sign of suspicion.

In the meantime that worthy gentleman was pondering over a scheme of a very different character. He had been leading a pleasant life in Naples, but now he found himself in difficulties from which it was necessary to extricate himself as quickly as possible. After a long and varied career, part of which had been passed in the service of a foreign gentleman, he had of late displayed considerable skill, and had very marked success as an electioneering agent. Now it happened, about this time, that the most influential heads of the Camorra were anxious to make use of the association for political purposes, but they knew there were many obstacles in the way of the realisation of their plan. The lower members of the body would resent, and even Don Antonio was likely silently to oppose, such an employment of the power with which they had been entrusted for other purposes. The matter must be skilfully managed, and from the reports of members of their party in other parts of the country they soon concluded that Don Giorgio was the man they wanted. Overtures were made to him, and, after some little hesitation, they were accepted.

In order to overawe the professed Camorrist of the lower classes, without whom nothing could be done, and Don Antonio, who had hitherto commanded and restrained them as well as the numerous members belonging to the lower middle-class, who had an almost unbounded confidence in him, it was judged necessary that the new agent should seem to belong to a social circle higher than theirs. For this reason very exaggerated reports of his talents and political influence were whispered about in the *salons*, he was furnished with good letters of introduction, and welcomed to houses from which he would other-

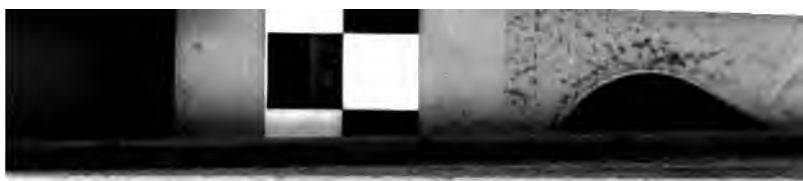
wise, beyond all doubt, have been excluded. All this was only so much dust which was intended for the eyes of Don Antonio, Don Giacomo, and such like common people, and it was strewn abroad with the greater energy because it was considered impossible that any gentleman should ever regard Don Giorgio as an equal.

If Don Eugenio had fallen into the trap which had been set for others, it was not from a want of susceptibility to the finer shades of dress and manner, but because he felt the whole society with which he was surrounded to be so essentially vulgar that a little vulgarity more or less seemed a matter of comparative indifference to him. His tastes were those of the Bourbonist circles to which he belonged by birth and education ; but he was convinced that they were effete, and that, as he was desirous of playing a part in active life, it was necessary for him to form other principles and other associations. He looked upon his sister, who, in accordance with her mother's will, had been educated abroad, as the worst bred woman he had ever met, and yet she exercised a strong influence over him. In a word, he had passed from one extreme to the other, and had not yet succeeded in taking the bearings of his new position.

When Don Giorgio was asked to undertake the mission to Naples, he hesitated for a time, but after a little reflection he concluded that in all probability Il Turco was either dead or safely confined in prison, and that, even if this were not the case, he himself would be secure from his violence, as he now stood under the special protection of the heads of the Camorra. As for Pesce Cane, he wished to meet him ; it would be a pleasure to order him about, and to make him feel the whole authority of a superior in the most disagreeable ways ; and, besides this, he had a less disinterested motive for desiring to unearth him. During one of his last electioneering campaigns

he had been in Pisa, and there made the acquaintance of a Neapolitan who had formerly served in the police force. As he retained some curiosity as to his native city he did his best to draw his new acquaintance out, and heard, among other things, the story of Don Carlo and his fabulous treasure. A few apparently purposeless questions convinced him that it was his own father who had died in prison, and many considerations contributed to persuade him that the report that he had been in the possession of hidden wealth was true. Don Carlo had always been a thrifty, not to say an avaricious man, and, if he had taken to housebreaking in his old age, it was probable that he had hoarded most of his gains. The fact that the larger part of the proceeds of his last robbery had never been discovered favoured this view, and his son found a perfectly satisfactory explanation of the apparent poverty in which the later years of his life had been passed in his dread of Il Turco and Domenico. If the old man had left a considerable sum of money, as seemed probable, there could be no doubt that he himself was the rightful heir, and if Pesce Cane, as he supposed, had laid his hands upon it, it would be an additional pleasure to compel him to disgorge. This, more than anything else, induced Don Giorgio to accept the offer made him with respect to Naples.

Shortly after his arrival in that town he became enamoured of Donna Elvira's wealth. He was so intoxicated with the social greatness thrust upon him that he was fully convinced it only required an independent fortune to enable him to play a great part in the world, and, though he was far from suspecting the feelings with which he was regarded by those among whom he moved, he noticed that that lady and her brother received him with a warmer graciousness than any of the rest. This he attributed to the charm of his person and his discourse, and he did



his best to follow up the impression he had made. For this purpose an elegant dress and establishment were requisite ; a fashionable tailor provided the first, and, though he had to trust to his own taste for the second, he succeeded in making it at least costly.

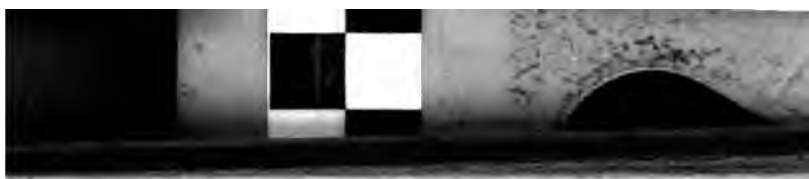
Now the means placed at his disposal by his employers had been ample for the purposes they had in view, but they were quite inadequate to support the style of living which he had adopted. His letter of credit had only been part of the general conspiracy to secure his social position ; it was an understood thing that he was to make no use of it, and he had the best of reasons for not attempting to betray the trust that had been placed in him. Nor did he think it would be wise at present to appeal to his employers for a further advance. His mission had not hitherto fulfilled the hopes that had been formed of it. This was partly his fault, perhaps, and partly theirs. A great part of his time and thoughts had, as we have seen, been occupied with other matters ; and they, while endeavouring to make use of him, had refrained from entrusting him with any important secret ; so that he was obliged to place himself in the hands of Don Antonio, who treated him with the greatest deference, and scrupulously executed all his commands, but whom he nevertheless suspected of secretly thwarting his designs.

When he commenced his career of splendour, Don Giorgio was well aware that the means at his disposal would not enable him to support the position he had assumed for any length of time, but he had calculated that, by a wise disposal of his ready money, he would be able to live in perfect ease for at least three months after it was spent, and by that time he hoped to have attained the end he had in view, and to have placed himself beyond the reach of money difficulties. During the last week or two, however, his table had been strewn every morning with bills and tradesmen's

letters. He had taken the precaution to give his custom only to wealthy and well-established houses, and yet all his creditors seemed suddenly to have been reduced to the most pressing want of ready money. Don Giorgio, who on his arrival had ascertained that Pesce Cane was then in *domicilio coatto*, and had heard nothing of his return, was quite at a loss to explain the phenomenon.

The situation in which he was thus placed compelled him to push on his plans with greater haste than he would otherwise have shown. He entertained no doubt that Donna Elvira was at least as anxious to assume his name as he was to come into possession of her property. In fact, he believed that she was literally pining away for love of him, and that it was only the opposition of her brother that prevented her from abandoning herself to her passion. That opposition he found it easy enough to explain. He took it for granted that her brother and his children would inherit her wealth in case she died without having married, and he was not inclined to judge harshly of a man who felt some reluctance to allowing so valuable an estate to pass out of his hands. Yet Don Eugenio had always treated him with great kindness, and had done nothing openly to oppose his suit. Might it not be possible to come to an understanding with him? He was young, and would probably have long to wait for his sister's death. Might he not be ready to accept a considerable sum, to be paid immediately after her marriage, in lieu of his larger but more distant prospects? The trial seemed worth making, now that things had come to their present pass.

It was with this purpose in his mind that Don Giorgio called on Don Eugenio, upon the day after the latter's interview with Domenico, somewhat earlier than usual. The nobleman received him with apparent frankness; but at the first hint of his proposal he



changed colour. In fact, he felt the strongest desire to turn his visitor out of the house, but then there was Donna Elvira in the background, and he was never sure as to how she would feel with respect to any matter. Besides, they had arranged that Don Giorgio should be put to the test with respect to a far more important matter as soon as possible, and, if that should turn out to his disadvantage, as Don Eugenio now felt certain that it would, he knew he was well rid of him for ever. So, after he had led his visitor on to explain all the details of his scheme, he simply replied that Donna Elvira was perfectly free to choose her own husband, and that he had no doubt, if she accepted her present suitor, all money matters would be amicably arranged.

When they descended to the *salon*, they found it empty, and so it was natural they should enter into a conversation upon public matters. The criminal code and prison discipline happened to turn up, and Don Giorgio expressed an orthodox horror of capital and every other form of corporal punishment.

"You know the English have re-introduced flogging," Don Eugenio replied.

"That may be, but in many respects they are behind the time. There can be no doubt that it is a brutal and degrading punishment."

"Of course it ought not to be generally applied. But has not a man who has been guilty of an outrage on a child reached the lowest depth possible? Can any punishment brutalise or degrade him?"

Don Giorgio felt as if his companion's eyes were burning his face, and he found some difficulty in steadying his voice to say: "At least it is a barbarous punishment."

"Perhaps one needs such when one has to do with men who are, in fact, barbarians. The worst thing I have heard against flogging is that it is apt to act a little unequally. There may be some difference in

the nerves of the patient, and then Il Turco used to say that a slight twist of the wrist might render the blows doubly painful."

At this moment Donna Elvira sailed into the room. "So you are talking your tiresome politics as usual. Tell me, who was Il Turco?"

"A friend of Pesce Cane's."

A single glance at Don Giorgio's face convinced both brother and sister as to his guilt. Indeed he found it impossible to regain his composure, and in a few moments he said he was unwell and took his leave. He was never permitted to enter the house again. In the course of the afternoon, however, other callers dropped in, and in the evening it was generally known that Don Giorgio had had the impudence to propose for Donna Elvira's hand, and that he had been forbidden the house in consequence. Some old maids said she had no right to be surprised at what had happened, as she had given him every encouragement, but the general opinion was that he had mistaken the freedom of manner which was due to her foreign education, and everybody was glad that a great scandal had been prevented.

Don Giorgio was now in no very enviable situation, but worse things still were in store for him. One evening, when he was passing down a dark and lonely street, a man suddenly sprang from one of the houses, stabbed him in the left arm, and then held him fast and called aloud for the police. A small crowd had collected before they appeared, and, when they did so, his assailant charged the political agent of the Camorra with having attempted to commit an assault on a little girl who stood there crying and clinging to her mother's knees. Both were taken into custody; but, on the very first examination, the man who had used his knife gave so clear, distinct, and coherent an account of the whole affair, and was so fully supported by the testimony of the mother and

the child, that he was at once released, whereas Don Giorgio was retained in prison until the matter could be fully investigated.

That afternoon Don Antonio gave Pesce Cane a sign that he wished to speak to him, and when they were alone he said: "You seem to have a *vendetta* against Don Giorgio. You had better drop it."

"Why?"

"He is under protection."

"He!" exclaimed Domenico, and then he clenched his fist. "It was to have revenge on him and his family that I first entered the service of the association. His father and his brother died in gaol, and I will not let go my hold upon him till he shares their fate. No one shall save him from me, and whoever tries to do so is my enemy."

"It is useless to discuss the matter," said Don Antonio quietly. "I am acting under the orders of my masters, and of yours, and I suppose that on reflection you will think it wise to obey them."

When Don Giorgio was brought up for trial, the evidence against him was so hesitating and self-contradictory that the jury found it impossible to condemn him, and he was set at liberty.

V

DOMENICO had planned his attack on Don Giorgio with far more than his usual care. In his youth he had been contented with simply knowing that Don Carlo and his son were miserable; but now he had become an epicure in vengeance, and he desired that the last of his enemies should suffer for the very crime he had in truth committed. It might be necessary, of course, to supplement the justice of the law-courts, but first let them inflict all the pain they

could. He was therefore provoked beyond endurance when he found that his scheme had been thwarted. A little reflection, however, convinced him that it was necessary to act with the greatest circumspection, for it was now clear to him that, before he could strike a blow at his enemy, Don Antonio must be put out of the way.

That was no easy matter. Among all his sworn friends he knew there was none who would assist him in such a design, none, indeed, who would not at once betray him, if he had the slightest suspicion of it. And, worse than all, his own mind was ill at ease on the subject. Lawless and criminal as his life had been, he had always served the Camorra with loyalty and devotion. He regarded it with an affection similar to that which better and more fortunate men feel for their country, and treachery to it was therefore repugnant to his nature. Yet he knew it must be done. The thought of abandoning his revenge never occurred to him. By long indulgence his passion for vengeance had become instinctive, a craving that must be satisfied, at whatever cost. He no more thought of questioning that than a man who has been honest all his life thinks of considering whether it would be advisable to steal whenever an opportunity of doing so presents itself.

As Don Antonio was under the especial protection of the Camorra, it was necessary for him to ally himself with the only power he knew which was capable of coping with the association. As we have seen, Pesce Cane's relations to the police had not always been of a hostile character ; indeed, there were several members of that force who had received favours from him, and, in their non-official capacity, were always ready to do him a service. Chief among these was the man who had discovered the stolen goods in Don Carlo's room. Since that day his advance had been rapid, and he now occupied a



position of considerable trust ; but that 'did not prevent him from remaining on friendly terms with the Camorrist, to whom he had frequently been indebted for friendly advice and assistance. Both, of course, observed the strictest secrecy with respect to their connection with each other.

Now, Domenico knew that his friend's greatest ambition was to be able to lay his hands on Don Antonio, and, though he was aware he would forfeit his respect by betraying his superior, he did not much mind that, as long as he succeeded in his design. But still, the matter was far from being as easy as it seemed. Now he came to reflect upon it, he really knew very little about Don Antonio, and the few important things he did know it was impossible for him to disclose. He might, of course, appear as a witness in open court and there give an account of facts, which, if he were believed, would ensure a conviction ; but he could hardly do so without implicating himself ; that would shake the weight of his testimony, and there would be no want of re-butting evidence. In case of his acting in this way, too, whatever the result for the accused might be, his own life would not be worth a week's purchase. He must remain carefully concealed behind the scenes, and to do so would require his utmost skill ; for, if it were to be suspected that any of the secrets of the association had been betrayed, there could be no doubt that the Camorra would institute the strictest investigation. It was the dread of such an inquiry which had deterred him from employing the shortest and simplest of all methods—his knife—and he did not feel inclined to incur it on what the whole association would consider a far more vital question than murder. It was clear, therefore, that the only information he could safely give was such as might be obtained from other sources than those which were intimately connected with the Camorra, and, if



334 STORIES OF NAPLES AND THE CAMORRA

possible, he must endeavour to throw the responsibility of such communications upon third persons.

It was a difficult problem, and he had pondered it over for several days, when it suddenly occurred to him that there must be others besides himself whom Don Antonio had offended in the exercise of his authority, if only he could find them out, and that some of these would probably be willing to give evidence against him, in case of a sufficient protection being promised. Pesce Cane now took to prowling about the streets and listening to the talk of the women who were sitting upon the doorsteps. Some weeks passed before he obtained any information that was likely to be of use to him. The first hint, indeed, was a chance reference to the widow who kept the water-stall, and he had to listen about for several days before he learnt the history of the transaction, because there was now nobody he could trust to do the work for him ; and, besides, he was obliged to be more careful than usual not to betray any interest in the matter he desired to investigate. By the exercise of patience, however, he succeeded in making himself thoroughly acquainted with that and several similar cases, in which Don Antonio had exceeded the usual limits of his functions, and himself compelled recusants to pay their dues to the Camorra. Not one of these was a Neapolitan by birth, and the motive of Don Antonio's interference had invariably been a wish to prevent the employment of such violence as he knew the lower agents of the association would use.

After all, the information Pesce Cane had succeeded in gathering did not amount to much. Even if the persons in question could be induced to deliver their testimony against their oppressor publicly, which was far from probable, it would not be sufficient to support a criminal charge. But then it would fully justify the police in consigning the accused to

domicilio coatto. If they chose that plan, the evidence might be heard privately, when it would no doubt be given readily enough, particularly if means were provided to enable the chief witnesses to leave the city at once, as most of them seemed desirous of doing. On reflection Domenico was glad that he had no more to tell. Though he disliked Don Antonio, his chief purpose was to get rid of him, not to punish him. He did not himself consider a year or so's residence in Ponza under police supervision as at all a serious matter. It would put his opponent out of the way for the time, and he would have the satisfaction of remembering that, at most, he had only caused his superior a little personal inconvenience, without furnishing the police with the slightest clue to any important matter.

When he communicated his notes and observations to his official friend, he added : " I am convinced that these stories are true, though I have not spoken to any of the persons whose names I give you. I have left you to do that, in order that no suspicion whatever may fall upon me."

Don Antonio had been sufficiently struck by the way in which Domenico had received his last orders to direct that a watch should be kept over him ; but, as several weeks passed without anything suspicious occurring, he began to look upon the reception of the reports of his doings as part of the routine of the day. He was not even much surprised by the news that he had had a secret interview with an official of some position. He knew that such private friendships between criminals and members of the police force were by no means rare ; he fancied that Pesce Cane's anger must have blown over by that time, and his own mind was occupied by other thoughts and anxieties. For the last year and a half things had not been going as he had hoped or wished. Don Giorgio's mission had only been one of many incidents which marked a

growing antagonism between the higher and the lower agents of the Camorra, and in this conflict he had been compelled to come more and more distinctly forward as the leader and representative of the latter. He knew he was suspected, in upper quarters, of being the cause of their agent's failure and misfortunes, and he felt that he was treated with more coldness and less confidence than heretofore. He looked at the future with something very closely approaching dismay ; for there seemed to be hardly any hope that the heads of the association would return to more prudent counsels, and that was, in his opinion, the last chance of avoiding a catastrophe. He had of late even begun to suspect them of a design of uniting with the distinctly criminal part of their followers for the purpose of crushing the opposition of such members as Don Giacomo, who had always given him their heartiest support in deprecating unnecessary violence ; and he was quite unable to say to what lengths they might go, or what would be the result. He was weary, too, and for the last few months his health had been failing ; but it was obviously impossible for him to resign any part of his duties in such critical circumstances. The more he did, the greater his influence naturally was, and his greatest support lay in the conviction that there was no one else who could undertake the more important part of his work. He was not, however, by any means sure that his employers understood this as well as he did, and of late he had frequently found quiet in the thought that, if the worst came to the worst, it would be easy for him to escape from all his troubles and from all his enemies. He had none of those outward ties which render it a duty to bear even a painful and hopeless life ; the great moderation in the enjoyment of all pleasures that owe their charm to the senses, which he had long practised, rendered the prospect of dying less dreadful to him than it is to most men ; and his imagination had never dwelt



upon the thoughts which make death in itself a terror.

He had been pondering these things long and earnestly one evening, when he was suddenly interrupted by a knock at his door. It startled him, for he was not accustomed to receive visitors—indeed there were few persons who knew any of his various places of residence—and, besides, the hour was late. He knew, however, that there was nothing in the room either to arouse or justify suspicion, so he at once opened the door. The man who entered wore the dress of a mechanic, a class with whom Don Antonio had comparatively little to do; but as soon as he came into the light he recognised the features of a policeman with whom he was acquainted by sight, and took his measures accordingly—

“May I ask who you are, and what brings you to me at this hour of the night?”

The man came close up to him, and spoke in a low voice, glancing furtively at the door all the time. “You must flee, you must make your escape as soon as possible, the police are on your track.”

“You must be mistaken in the person you have before you. I have nothing to conceal from the police, and am entirely at their command whenever they want me.”

The visitor was taken quite aback. He seemed completely perplexed for a moment, and then he asked, “Don’t you know me? I am Luigino, the son of Anna, the widow whom you saved from starvation after her husband’s death—long ago—when I was only so high.”

“You are Luigino, are you? How is your worthy mother?”

“She is dead, God rest her soul. But, Don Antonio, I am a policeman now, and have heard at least something of what is being planned against you; so I have come to warn you, at what danger to myself you know.”

"I have said I have nothing to conceal from the police; but of course it might be amusing to hear anything they wish to conceal from me."

"You are right, there is no reason that you should trust me." There was some pain but no anger in the tone. "I will simply tell you what I know, and leave you to act upon it as you think best. My superior officer has a great trust in me, and I have deserved it. You will say I am abusing his confidence now. That is true; but on her death-bed my mother told us never to forget that, next to God, we owed everything in the world to you. Well, I happen to know that of late he has been in communication with a *Capo Paranse* who is well known to us all. He is called Pesce Cane, and he has, I believe, several times assisted us, though only, of course, for his own ends. After their first meeting I was furnished with a list of names, and told what inquiries were to be made. They all refer to you. I was, of course, obliged to obey orders. Here is my report. You had better read it over now; I cannot leave it with you."

Don Antonio drew his chair nearer to the lamp and read the papers through carefully. He then returned them, with the words: "After all, even if that could be proved, it would not make a strong case."

"No; if that is all the evidence I do not think they will venture to bring it into court, but will be content with sending you to Ponza without a trial. But I fear there is more behind."

"What?"

"I have told you all I really know. But this is an important matter. It is likely that two or three of us have been employed on different parts of it. You best know whether Don Giorgio can do you any harm; he has been closeted with our chief twice lately, each time for more than two hours, and since then the chief has spent all his free time in poring over papers relating to old criminal cases."



"Which?"

"There have been many, but I have only been able to get a sight of two packets. One referred to a man of the name of Carlo Irace, who died in prison, as far as I can make out, many years ago."

"Well?"

"The other to the Colonel who was stabbed in the villa. You must surely remember that."

"Yes."

"When he gave me that bundle to carry up to the archives, the chief said—'They were all on a false scent in that matter, Luigi; they forgot that the Colonel was the bitterest enemy the Camorra then had'—and he drew himself up, as much as to say, 'They have to do with me now, and will find me harder to deal with. I have no doubt,' he continued, 'that it was Il Turco who killed him, but, as he is dead now, it is probable the affair will never be cleared up.'"

"In that case he certainly will not be able to make use of it against me."

"No, but it shows that his thoughts are constantly running upon the Camorra."

There was a pause before Antonio asked, "What would you advise me to do under the circumstances?"

"To escape at once—to-night. To-morrow morning secret orders will be issued to all the offices of the *dazii comunali* not to let you pass."

"And when will the order for my arrest be issued?"

"Not for the next few days, I fancy. For some reason or other they want to take you in company with several of your associates, and to give the evidence against you the appearance of having been collected after your person was in their hands. You will not even be watched more closely than you usually are, except in the fish market. I and three other men in whom they have a special trust are ordered to keep our eyes constantly upon you there."

But your popularity is known, and they are afraid you will be warned if the great body of the police suspect you are wanted."

"It is Wednesday night—or rather Thursday morning now. Do you think I shall be safe till Sunday?"

"I believe so, if you allow no one to fancy you are going to escape, and are found in no circumstances that can be regarded as suspicious."

"What you tell me renders it probable that I shall be taken into custody, and how long I may be detained under these new Italian laws, heaven only knows, though it would show a disaffection against the Government, of which I should be sorry to be guilty, if a man so innocent as I am were to doubt of his final acquittal. There are private affairs I should like to arrange before being deprived of my liberty. Luigi," he added in a far more cordial tone, "your mother was not the only poor person whom I have assisted. There are some who still need my help, who will starve if they are deprived of it. By Saturday night I can put all that in order. After that is done arrest me as soon as you like, or at least as you can, but give me time till then."

"If it lay with me," Luigino answered eagerly, "you would not be arrested, but appointed prefect. But what can I do?"

"I will tell you. You will hear when the order is issued. If it is after Saturday night, be still and simply do as you are bid. But, if it is earlier, go to your superior and tell him that you believe you can draw important information from me if he will wait for a day or two. You had better tell him the whole truth about your childhood, and say that you intend to deceive me by warning me to escape."

"In that case the house in which you are will be watched."

"That won't matter; and, in case you are obliged



to have recourse to this plan, I promise you, on my word of honour, that I will supply you with far more important information against myself than any that is at all likely to be at present in the hands of justice."

"I will do my best, if you wish it."

"Well, then, we had better part now, as I shall have a good deal to do before Saturday night," and Don Antonio drew a hundred lire note from his pocket-book.

Luigino at first showed some hesitation in accepting it, but his objections were at length overcome, and he took his leave. Before he had reached the door, however, Don Antonio stopped him with the question—"How did you find me out?"

"Ah, I had forgotten to tell you that; many, I believe all, of your residences are known to the police."

"Very well; you will always find me here till Saturday—that is to say, after midnight."

When Luigino had left the room, Don Antonio paced the chamber to and fro. His thoughts turned instinctively to the weakest part of the evidence against him. He knew nothing, except by hearsay, of the condemnation of Don Carlo and his son, and his connection with the assassination of the Colonel was of the most indirect character, and impossible of legal proof. But the very insufficiency of the evidence advanced seemed to him to be so much in favour of the good faith of his visitor; if he had been sent to betray him into some imprudent word or action, there would have been no flaws in his story. At any rate, the substance of the report was correct; it, at least, could doubtless be proved, and the *domicilio coatto* appeared a very different thing to the man of failing health, weak digestion, and scrupulously neat and cleanly habits, to what it seemed to the rough and hearty Domenico. But he felt sure the matter would not

end there. What did Don Giorglo want with the police? He knew the man well enough to be satisfied that there was no treachery of which he would be incapable; but then, what information had he to give? At this moment a sudden suspicion broke upon Don Antonio's mind. The heads of the Camorra wanted to get rid of him, in order that they might carry out their plans without opposition. It is true they had told him that their connection with Don Giorglo had ceased. That was only a blind. The more he considered the matter, the more certain it appeared; and he smiled to think of the cunning which had induced them to prompt two men, whom he knew to be bitter enemies, and was therefore unlikely to suspect of collusion, to betray him.

At first his pulses quickened at the thought of the vengeance he might take. His enemies were at least as much in his power as he was in theirs. A few words from him, supported by such evidence as he could produce at any moment, would drag them from their luxurious homes to prison; and the men who were to-day the envy and admiration of the great would to-morrow be social outcasts. Since they had dared to drive him to extremities, they should feel his power.

But it was not long that this mood continued. He had spent the best years of his life in building up the Camorra; he had served it with all his energies, and with an almost boundless self-devotion; it had been the one interest of a life which had grown more and more ascetic from the day on which he was first employed in matters of trust. His heart sickened at the thought of breaking his idol and undoing his work. And then, would not his own followers be involved in the general destruction that must ensue upon his revelations? They had trusted, they were true to him; he must be faithful to them at whatever cost.



He threw himself on his bed with a weary feeling that there must be a way of escape, if he could find it. If his mind were as strong and clear as it had been only two years ago, he was sure that he could thwart this conspiracy, as he had so many other deeply laid designs. In another minute he had started up, and was pacing the room once more. His imagination was employed in realising all the details of prison life—the dreary, daily routine, the coarse food, the comfortless beds, the base companionship, and, above all, the constant indignities to which he would be exposed. Of late years his one pleasure had consisted in the exercise of his power, and now he was to be reduced to the worst and bitterest form of servitude. No, come what would, that was not to be endured.

He was at the fish-market next morning, but only to say he was unwell—an assertion which his worn and jaded look fully confirmed—and to give the pressing business which had to be done into other hands. He then sauntered round the place, and asked two or three of the dealers if he could have a *rombo*¹ on Sunday morning. They all agreed to keep one for him if it turned up, but refused to make any further promise. After that he went home.

In the afternoon, when he again left the house, he had quite regained his usual manner and appearance, and seemed to be pursuing his usual avocations. At about a quarter past three he entered Don Giacomo's wine-store, and you would have thought by his reception that he was a large, regular customer. Everybody seemed anxious to serve him, and as soon as the master was informed of his presence he at once came out of his private room, in which, if the truth must be told, he had been taking his mid-day nap. As soon as the usual greetings had passed, Don Antonio said he wished to purchase a little good

¹ A flat fish closely resembling a turbot, but smaller.

old wine, of a kind which he described, as he had forgotten its name, and added that he was so particular about it because he had not felt well lately.

"Ah, yes ; I know exactly what you want," rejoined Don Giacomo. "If you will step into my office, I will have a sample brought at once."

Don Antonio accepted the invitation, and the wine-merchant followed him as soon as he had sent a youth to fetch a bottle of an especially choice vintage, which lay in the furthest corner of his private cellar.

"You were right in coming to me, instead of a doctor," he continued, as soon as they were seated. "Good wine is the best medicine. You will see how soon it will set you up again, if you only take enough of it."

"I have such confidence in my physician," replied Don Antonio, with a smile, "that I want his assistance in a matter not strictly connected with his profession."

"What can I do for you ?"

"Take care of this," and he handed a sealed packet to the wine merchant, who immediately slipped it into his capacious breast-pocket. "You will see, when you look at it, that it does not bear the mark of the association. Please examine any papers you may receive from me carefully—those that have not the mark on them refer only to my private affairs. The Camorra must know nothing about them. I may have to communicate with you again shortly. As to what I have given you now, I only wish to know that it is in safe keeping. In case of my death, you would open it."

"Come, now, you mustn't talk of dying, or I shall think you have no faith in my prescriptions."

"Life is always uncertain, and it is best to be prepared for whatever may happen."

"That's true. I altered my own will last week. I



generally do when I feel out of sorts ; it helps to fill up the time. But, though neither you nor I are as young as we once were, we are both of us good for many a long year yet."

"I hope yours will be happy ones."

The wine was brought and duly praised.

"How many bottles may I send you ?"

"Half-a-dozen."

"Why, those will hardly last till the end of the week. You cannot expect a cure to be effected in so short a time as that."

"I have no good place to keep them in, and can come to you for more when they are done. But tell me, how is Peppiniello getting on ?"

"Excellently ; the boy is a treasure ; he has more good sense than ten grown men. Even his reading and writing haven't spoiled him. He's in the country now, on business, but he'll be back by to-morrow evening. You should drop in some day, and have a look at him. He is a great help to me already ; in a few years' time I shall be able to trust everything to him, and it's pleasant to have something to look forward to, you know."

Don Antonio expressed his satisfaction at hearing that the youth was doing so well.

"The whole house has grown quite a different place since the children have been in it, and my wife seems at least ten years younger. She has quite recovered the use of her voice, for one thing. Why, she was beginning to speak only under her breath ; one hardly knew whether she was in the house. You see she had only old servants about her. But now she scolds as loudly as she did in the first years of our marriage—it's a pleasure to hear her."

"They must be a great trouble both to her and to you ; I was amazed that either of you undertook it, but I am sorry to hear your wife finds it so heavy a burden, for I am sure that scolding is no pleasure to her."

"Isn't it? Ah, you don't know women," rejoined Don Giacomo, with the conscious superiority of a married man. "They all like it, though they won't own to it, and it's good for them too. You see they haven't our business and amusements, and they need something to keep the blood in motion. Now that's just what Concetta has done for my wife."

"Is she so tiresome?"

"She's the best girl alive, the most honest, faithful, and willing; but then—well, no, she isn't exactly stupid, either—but, you see, when she came to us, she wasn't quite used to our ways. She used to seize every opportunity of breaking glasses and earthenware; she was fond of washing her face with the dishcloth, and the plates with her towel, and she was once discovered in the act of cleaning the spoons with her tongue. You can imagine what a trial such things must have been to the feelings of an orderly old lady, particularly as they always made me laugh."

"I wonder she did not send her off at once. No, on the whole, I don't wonder at that, because I know how kind-hearted you both are. But it would be easy to find a tolerable home for the poor children without making your own uncomfortable. For your wife's sake you surely ought to get rid of them."

"I wish you would tell her so," replied the wine-merchant, with a laugh; "but perhaps you had better not. If you wanted to see her a little out of temper you might ask her to part with her pearls and corals. I shouldn't like to do that myself. But, if you want to take the children away, just let me know beforehand: it's likely I should have a month or two's pressing business in Rome about that time."

"She is fond of Concetta, then, after all?"

"Oh, yes, she likes her well enough. The girl's really getting on, too, and beginning to be of use. If her mistress goes on scolding her now, it's only because she has got into the habit, and because, as I told



you, she likes it, and it's good for her. She would be very sorry if Concetta were to go away, and then, if she did, there would be no keeping Nannina. What do you think the little monkey said the other day? My wife had given her something to do—more play than work, you know—it was merely to keep her quiet—and Peppiniello, who knew nothing about it, called her away. When she came back, my wife asked her why she had left her task? 'Peppiniello called me.' 'But didn't I tell you not to go away till you had finished your work?' 'You are very kind to me, and so is Don Giacomo, and I love you, and try to do as you bid me, and let you call me *your* Nannina, and *your* little lady. But of course that's only make believe; everybody knows that I really belong to Peppiniello.'

"What did your wife say to that?"

"Nothing; she kissed her, I suppose. You see the child has got a hold over her heart, and mine too; she can do pretty much as she likes with both of us, and no wonder; she's as quiet as a mouse, as gentle as a lamb, and as full of fun as a kitten. There's only one thing I should like to change in her."

"What is that, her affection for Peppiniello?"

"No, no, the boy's a jewel, he deserves that, and it's quite as well she should really obey some one. But she's as different as can be from the other girls, and yet she won't let us treat her differently. They must have as good clothes, and the same food and amusements as she has. It's quite a right feeling, of course; but then, it's a little inconvenient."

Don Antonio rose to go. His friend detained him.

"You can't think how clever she is: last Carnival my wife dressed her up like a young gentleman, and our old maid-servant as a footman, and sent them both down to us. You should have seen how she strutted into the store, and how well she played her part. After a while she began to tease Peppiniello and me.

She told me the wine samples I set before her were made for sale, and not for my own table, and asked him if he wasn't in love. Then she made him taste the samples, and when he had done so she said she was sure they were good for nothing, because he didn't make the right face over them, and, taking up a glass, she mimicked the way in which I sip such wine as this. It was a good ten minutes before we recognised her; indeed, I doubt whether we should have found them out at all if the old woman had not burst out laughing. I'll tell you what: I intend to give a large party next Carnival. You must come to it, and then you will see her act. You can wear a mask, you know, and if you keep quiet no one will notice you."

"Well, we can talk about that when the time comes," said Don Antonio; and so he took his leave.

He turned in the direction of the Mergellina, for he was desirous of giving his friends there a warning that it was possible the examination into the assassination of the Colonel might be re-opened. Before he reached the point, however, at which he hoped to meet one of the persons concerned, he saw a policeman walking up and down. He was not one of those who were usually on that beat, so Don Antonio's suspicions were aroused, and he slackened his pace to consider what had better be done. If he asked Michele to row him over to the Porto as he had at first intended, the police might suspect that he was making an effort to escape, and arrest him at once. That was a risk it would be wisest not to run; and yet it seemed to be impossible to get an opportunity for a sufficiently long conversation with the fisherman on the shore without exciting suspicions it was his chief wish to put to sleep. Suddenly a new idea occurred to him. "That is as good a way as any other," he thought;

his face immediately brightened, and his steps quickened. In a minute he saw the fisherman he most wished to speak to, beckoned to him, and hastened his pace, so as to meet him in the middle of a little space that was free of drawn-up boats, where no one could listen to them unobserved. The policeman had his eyes on them, but he was afraid of exciting attention if he walked more rapidly, so he merely sauntered towards them.

"Take care, Michele, we are watched," said Don Antonio, in a low, quick voice. "If you wish to do me a favour, you will be waiting in a boat alone off the quarry, a little seawards of Cumae, at moon-rise on Saturday night. I will meet you there. No one else must know. It is a matter of life and death."

"My life is at your service."

The policeman had now left the road. He seemed to be greatly interested in the condition of the boats that were drawn up round him; he tapped the sides of one, and looked into another, but he was constantly approaching the two speakers.

"I trust you entirely," said Don Antonio, in a low earnest voice, and then he added in quite a different tone, "I know he is particularly fond of *rombi*, and if possible I should like one; I would pay well for it."

"If I can find one, of course your Excellency shall have it," replied Michele, who quite understood the change of tone, "but they are strange fish. You may catch four or five in a single day, and you may fish four or five months without finding one."

"Well, if it is impossible for you or your neighbours to lay hold of one, you must take two large *spinole* instead: but I should prefer the *rombo*."

"I will do my best. No one can do more than that."

"And you know Don Diodato's house?"

"That is not hard to find."

"Well, then, you understand the fish must be there early on Sunday morning."

"Would not Tuesday do as well? It would give us more time, and we are busy just now."

"No, Sunday is his saint's day. He must have it in time for his dinner."

"You may depend on me, I will do my best."

"I will give you a word or two to send with it." And Don Antonio went to the boat next that which the policeman was examining, and, taking out his pocket book, he wrote on a visiting card, "With congratulations and compliments," slipped it into a small envelope, addressed it to Don Diodato, and gave it to Michele.

"You had better put a bit of paper round it, to keep it clean."

Don Antonio did so.

"Good-bye."

"Good-bye."

As soon as Michele returned to his place he began to abuse the folly of landsmen, who would insist on having impossible kinds of fish.

"What did he want then?" asked Salvatore.

"Nothing will satisfy him but a fresh *rombo* on Sunday morning."

"Then you'll have to go over there and see if the fishermen happen to have caught one," remarked Gaetano, tossing his head in the direction of Cumae, and the Bay of Gaeta.

"Of course I shall."

Salvatore was on the point of offering to do the errand for his friend when a sharp look from Michele silenced him.

That night the police were duly informed that Don Antonio had ordered a *rombo* for Sunday morning both at the fish-market and the Mergellina, and that in the latter place he had ordered it to be taken

to Don Diodato. After due consideration, however, they were unable to discover anything suspicious in the matter.

Don Antonio took a cab, and on descending from it at the door of a *trattoria* in a crowded thoroughfare, he said, while fumbling in his purse, "You must find somebody to take to Soccavo on Saturday. Leave them there, and meet me as near Fuorigrotta as you can without exciting attention, ten minutes after sunset. Take two strong horses and—" he made a sign to denote secrecy. The man nodded.

Don Antonio made an excellent dinner, and before his return home he had received intimation from three different quarters of the orders that had been issued to the *dasii comunali* not to let him pass.

It was about two hours before sunset on Saturday afternoon when he issued from his house. He walked through the streets which were so familiar to him with a strange feeling that he was never to see them again. An impulse which he himself could not at first explain induced him to take the direction of Don Giacomo's wine vaults. Suddenly it became clear to him that it was a longing to see Peppiniello once more that had made him feel as if it were necessary to give him the paper which he carried in his pocket. He at once turned, and retraced half his way by different streets, saying inwardly, "Nonsense, nonsense, it would do me no good, and it might bring the boy into trouble. Michele is as safe a hand." He dined more heartily as well as earlier than usual, and then entered a house not far from the *taverna*.

About half an hour afterwards a man, apparently old, and dressed like a peasant, issued from the house, and took his way to the neighbouring square, where a peasant's cart was waiting.

"Well, father," said the driver, "you're the strangest creature I ever met; it's a world's work to get

you to come to town, and when you're once there it's just as hard to get you out again."

The old man said nothing. A policeman who was standing near good-humouredly helped him up to his place. An old woman was also seated in the cart, and the party drove off in the direction of the Grotto. The custom house officers at the town end of the tunnel saw nothing suspicious about them, and allowed them to pass without making any inquiries. As soon as they were well out of the village of Fuorigrotta, however, and had reached the narrow passage just beyond the point where the road to the Lago d'Agnano separates from that which leads to Soccavo, the old man sprang up, with far more agility than he had hitherto displayed, slipped a bank-note into the driver's hand, let a bundle that had been lying at his feet fall on to the road, and jumped out after it. The peasant drove on, without checking his horse, or turning his head ; but the old woman saw how the old man picked up his bundle and hobbled with it to the foot of a tree which stood on a bank beside the road. He lay down on his face, with his head and arms upon it, as if he intended to pass the night there.

In about ten minutes, a two-horsed carriage came from the opposite direction. The coachman was driving slowly, and keeping a sharp look-out on both sides of the way ; he stopped at a sign from the old man, who at once rose, opened the door of the vehicle, and said :—

"The Arco Felice as quickly as possible."

"Why, Don Antonio, who could have thought it was you !"

"Don't ask questions, but drive on."

The stars were out before they reached their destination. Don Antonio descended at once, paid the coachman liberally, took his bundle, and struck into a path to the left. Leaving Cumae to his right, he

chose a steep and narrow footway that led down to the shore. The bundle was heavy, and every now and then he had to pause and rest. He had known that part of the country well in his boyhood, but he had not visited it for years; indeed he could not remember having been in that exact spot since his excursion with Mr. Williams. At times he thought he must have missed his way; it seemed so much longer than it used to be. At length, however, he reached the shore, at the very point he wished, and was soon seated on a large block of tufa, which lay just at the foot of the deserted quarry. It was a calm, cloudless night. The stars beamed with a somewhat softened splendour through the pearly summer haze, and the ripple lapped the stones so softly that you had to listen to catch its tone. Behind him lay the dark, heavy masses of the hills he had descended; before him the boundless empty expanse of the sea. Presently the air began to brighten; he could trace the low, sweeping curve of the shore to the right, by the black line of the holm oaks in the royal preserves. The moon was evidently rising, though he could not see it for the hills. And then—yes, that was a boat approaching. In ten minutes he was seated beside Michele.

"Where shall I take you to?"

"Where is the water deepest?"

"All along the shore here it is uncertain, there are depths and shallows; but out there it deepens gradually from the land to more than a hundred *braccia*."

"Well, out in that direction, what is the bottom?"

"There is black mud further out in places, but in front of us there is sand; that is why the *rombi* are so fond of this part of the coast. I have got one for you; it was caught this evening."

"Let me see it."

It was really a fine fish, and Don Antonio praised it.

A A

"I had better pay you for it, and for your night's work, at once," he said, and he took a number of bank-notes out of his pocket-book and handed them to the fisherman.

"You must be mistaken, you have given me fifty lire; the fish is only worth twelve."

"Put the money in your pocket, and let us get some supper. I have told you it is for the work you have still to do for me as well; the night is not half finished yet. Wait, you may as well take this too," and he drew a handful of soldi from his two waistcoat pockets, and gave them to Michele, who was amazed at this generosity, as Don Antonio was generally considered rather close in his dealings. Still, he did not venture on a second protest. His thoughts recurred to the supper, which was a pleasant, though not quite realisable, idea.

"I have only a crust, and about a quarter of a *mummera* of spring water with me. They are quite at your service. I am afraid the water is warm, as it has been with me all day, but it is from the Leone. I have nothing else here, and there is no place nearer than Mondragone at which we can get anything."

"I have thought of that," said Don Antonio, and he drew from his breast a large flask which contained nearly two bottles of Don Giacomo's wine. Then, opening his bundle, he produced cold meat and bread, which he gave to his companion, a flat tin case, and a silver fork. The case contained a quantity of half-melted snow, which he carefully caked and bound round the flask, and a little closed enamelled dish, full of salad, made of the Italian lobster.

"This has always been my favourite dish," he said, "and I have not eaten it for nearly a year, but to-night I need not be afraid of indigestion."

Michele had never heard him laugh before; but his spirits were raised by the sight of the unexpected

provisions, so he replied :—" Oh, no, one can eat anything when one's at sea."

"Well, then, come and take your supper comfortably."

The fisherman looked round him ; there was no danger, so he left his oars. The boat drifted, and the two chatted about quite indifferent matters. Don Antonio did full justice to the wine, of which he drank more than his share. When the flask was empty, he carefully filled it with sea-water and returned it to its place. He had already tossed the fork and the tin case overboard. Since the rowing had stopped, they had perceptibly neared the shore.

"You must pull back to where we were."

The fisherman obeyed.

"You remember the affair of the Colonel? How many who were engaged in it are still alive?"

"My father and Giuseppe are dead ; let me see, there are three of us."

"You need not mention names. Perhaps I know them. Can all of them be trusted not to wag their tongues?"

"Of course."

"I don't mean intentionally to betray the matter, but not to chatter about it to their wives, or when they are in their cups."

"I can only answer for myself, but I have felt full trust in them all."

"Salvatore is not with you?"

"No."

"The general talk in Mergellina is that Gabriele stabbed the Colonel."

"It must have been Giuseppe who spread the report. He was so proud of his master that he was quite unable to hold his tongue when he knew anything to his advantage."

"Such men ought not to be employed in matters that require silence."

"I should have said so at the time, if I had been asked."

"Well, there is some possibility that the police may make a new examination into that matter. I do not think it is likely, but it is possible. I have started a report in other parts of the town that it was Il Turco who killed the Colonel. He is dead, so they can't hurt him. You had better pass the word to the rest, and spread the story as quickly, but as widely, as you can in Mergellina."

The fisherman promised, and then there was an interval of silence. The boat's head was directed to the furthest point of Ischia now.

"I told you before we started," resumed Don Antonio, "that it was a matter of life and death on which I should be engaged to-night. You must swear to me now not to interrupt me in any of my undertakings, to obey my orders to the letter, and never to speak of anything that may happen."

"Never?"

"Well, let us say, not in the next three years."

"Not in confession?"

"If you want to confess you may do so to Don Diodato, but to no one else; are you willing to do as I ask you?"

"Yes."

The oath was proposed and sworn.

"After you return to Naples, you must give Don Giacomo this packet as soon as you can without exciting attention, and give him a full and exact account of everything that passes to-night."

"Very well."

"Where are you going to put the letter?"

"Here," and the fisherman held out his cap.

"That won't do," and Don Antonio went to the other end of the boat and sewed the papers into the inside of Michele's shirt.

"I am to tell him everything?" asked the fisherman.

"Yes, everything, and don't forget how much we enjoyed his wine."

Don Antonio took off his boots, slipped into each of them what seemed to be a flat leaden sole, put them on again, and fastened to his neck and shoulders something that looked like a broad, thick collar of the same metal. His companion looked on with astonishment, but did not venture to say anything till his passenger asked : "What is the bottom here?"

"Sand."

Don Antonio lifted his feet heavily and with great apparent difficulty over the side of the boat, when the fisherman cried out in terror, "What are you doing?"

The whole body was in the water now, but Don Antonio still clung to the side of the boat with his hands.

"Good-night, and thank you, Michele," he said, in a quiet friendly voice, and then let go his hold.

The fisherman sprang forwards, and gazed upon the spot where he had sunk. A number of bubbles continued to rise to the surface for a time, and then the water was quite still again.

Michele never knew how long he remained motionlessly looking down into the darkness below, but suddenly a great dread overcame him, and he began to row vigorously in the direction of Monte Procida.

VI

MICHELE did not reach Naples till nearly eight o'clock. He at once sent the *rombo*, with Don Antonio's card, to its destination, dressed, and went to Mass. When that was over it was still too early to visit Don Giacomo ; so he lay down on his bed, with the intention of resting for an hour or two ; but he

was so worn out by his exertions and the excitement of the last twenty-four hours that he almost immediately fell into a deep sleep. It was evening when he awakened. He was vexed to think that the hours when it would have been comparatively easy for him to see the wine-dealer without attracting attention had slipped by, but he durst not keep Don Antonio's papers near him for another night ; come what might, they must be delivered at once.

Don Giacomo had company to dine with him that evening, as he usually had on Sundays, and, when he heard that a fisherman was particularly anxious to speak with him, he sent Peppiniello out to inquire into his business.

Michele knew that the youth was said to stand under the peculiar protection of Don Antonio, and that he enjoyed his master's complete confidence ; so he ventured to tell him that he had come on a matter of the greatest moment. Could it not wait till to-morrow morning ? No. Could it not be intrusted to him ? It was impossible. Peppiniello still hesitated. He knew how unwilling the wine-merchant was to be disturbed with business matters in his leisure hours, and when he was enjoying the pleasures of society and the table. At last the fisherman came close up to him, and said in a low voice, " I will tell you, but you must tell no one else ; I am from Don Antonio."

The youth's manner at once changed. He led Michele into a private room, lighted a lamp that stood upon the table, and said, " Wait here."

When he returned to the dining-room he resumed his place silently. None of the company noticed the sign he made to his master. In about a minute afterwards the latter rose and left the room without speaking. Don Giacomo did not return that evening. He sent a private message to Peppiniello that he had retired to rest, as he did not feel quite well. He bade him see that all the wants of the guests were supplied,



and that they were not informed of the cause of his absence until they expressed a wish to bid him good-night. And yet he had not gone to bed ; the youth heard him pacing up and down the neighbouring room long after the company had separated and he himself had put out his light.

Don Giacomo had never acknowledged to himself a regret that he was unacquainted with the new-fangled arts of reading and writing until the following morning. He had always found people to do the little of that kind of work that he wanted for him ; but now he was in possession of papers which referred beyond doubt to matters of the utmost moment, and probably contained an explanation of his friend's untimely death, and yet he was unable to form even a guess as to their contents. He remembered too well the warning which Don Antonio had given him during their last interview to think of submitting them to the Camorrist who usually read to him the letters and documents which bore the sign of the association. His own confidential clerk had died some three months before, and Peppiniello had, to all intents and purposes, been installed in his place ; but the boy was very young to be trusted in a matter of such weight, and, besides, it was by no means improbable that some of the papers might refer to him. Among all his acquaintances Don Diodato was the only one in whose discretion and judgment he felt inclined to rely, and he had almost resolved to request his assistance, when he remembered that Don Antonio had been engaged in many matters of which the priest must disapprove, and some which he would probably feel it his duty to reveal, if he became acquainted with them in any way except by means of the confessional. That was a risk that must not be run. Peppiniello's early training, while leaving him still a boy at heart, had taught him an acuteness and self-command beyond his years, and his devotion both to Don Giacomo and

his dead friend was beyond suspicion. He might be mentioned in the papers, which certainly had not been intended for his eye, but it could not do him much injury to know he had been the object of friendly solicitude to one who could now watch over him no more. At any rate, it was better to take that chance than to leave the packets any longer unbroken, or to trust them to less affectionate eyes.

There was another difficulty, however. Don Giacomo knew the boy well enough to be sure that the news of Don Antonio's death would produce such an effect upon him as could not be concealed from the rest of the household. Michele's account rendered it probable that it was desirable to keep the event a secret, and, if so, no suspicion ought to be raised. Half-confidences were dangerous. He would take the boy away for a day or two to some quiet place, and there tell him the whole truth.

This was the reason why he said to his wife at lunch, "You have been teasing me for the last few weeks to take you to Meta," a small village between Vico Equense and Sorrento, where Don Giacomo had a house and garden which were left for ten months in the year to the care of a superannuated servant and his wife. "Well, I have some business to do in Massa ; I shall take Peppiniello with me, and we will get the house ready for you."

The good woman would hardly have been more surprised if her husband had informed her that he intended to extinguish Vesuvius. The idea of his getting a house ready for anybody, or indeed of his living in one which she had not got thoroughly ready for him, was entirely new, and abundantly humorous.

"I should like to see you hard at work about it," she said, with a hearty peal of laughter.

"Well, I don't mean that we are going to sweep the rooms and move the furniture ourselves, but we

shall stay there, because it is more convenient than an inn, and we can tell the old people to do what they can."

"If you will wait till to-morrow morning, we will all go over with you, and everything will be in order by the evening, when you come back from Massa."

"And everything will be in disorder here all the afternoon and night. No, thank you, that is just what I want to avoid. Besides, I may have to come to town to-morrow or next day. But you may get everything ready for leaving to-morrow week, if you like."

Accordingly, that evening Don Giacomo and Peppiniello dined alone in Meta. Afterwards they took a turn or two in the garden, and then retired into the room in which they were to sleep together. It was not nearly bedtime yet ; but it was better the story should be told there than in a place that was open to observation ; and yet, even after the windows were closed, the master hesitated, not now from any doubt in the expediency of his plan, but from an instinctive, almost physical, reluctance to inflict pain. At last he blurted out the news that Don Antonio was dead, roughly and unexpectedly. The boy uttered a sharp cry, like that of a wounded animal, threw himself on the ground, and sobbed and moaned. It was long before Don Giacomo could persuade him to lay himself upon the bed, and, when he had done so, he continued in his apparently only half-conscious state : he asked no question ; indeed, he spoke no word. A little after midnight, however, his breathing became quieter, and on approaching his bed his companion saw that he had fallen asleep.

When Don Giacomo woke next morning, he was surprised to find Peppiniello was lying quite quietly beside him, though he was wide awake. In a minute or two the youth asked particulars as to Don Antonio's death ; and, after he had given a promise of secrecy,

the whole story was told him. He listened very attentively, but he hardly made a remark, and did not drop a single tear—even on the previous night he had not really wept. To the master this calm seemed stranger than the storm that had preceded it.

In the forenoon, when they were walking together in the garden, he said, "He was a good friend to you," and told him of all the dead man had done for him. The tale loosened the boy's tears, and he wept copiously though silently.

"And now it is your turn to do something for him," continued the elder man.

"I can never do anything for him any more. Don't you see, that is just the sadness of it?" sobbed Peppiniello, and then he added in a lower tone, "except pray for him."

"Yes, you can ; he has left papers with me, and I want you to read them to me, that we may know what he wished both of us to do."

That afternoon Peppiniello read the papers aloud ; the last sent was the first to be opened. I give only the more important passages :—

"When you read these lines, dearest friend," the letter began, "the hand that writes them will be stiff and cold ; if you do not already know the particulars of my death, in a few hours you will be fully acquainted with them. I cannot hope that you will view my resolution with approbation, or, indeed, with anything less than horror and condemnation. I do not ask you to do so. Perhaps, if I were a better man, I should act differently ; but I do not want you to think that I have gone mad, or done anything hastily, or without due consideration—or—what would be far worse—that I have abandoned my friends in the hour of danger, and thrown away the labour of a life, rather than bear a few months, or even years, of imprisonment. It is true that I have been betrayed—" Peppiniello sprang to his feet when he



read the words ; at a sign from Don Giacomo, however, he resumed his seat, and continued to read—"but I have taken steps to secure full vengeance on those of whose guilt I am certain—you will find their names in envelope No. 5—if others, too, are not free from treachery, they will find they have lost more than they imagined by my death, and that will be a sufficient punishment for them——"

Peppiniello paused when he came to this point. He was searching among the closed envelopes on the table for No. 5. When he had found it, Don Giacomo said :—

"Give me that paper."

The youth hesitated.

"It is addressed to me, and not to you. Put it down here and go on reading."

The youth had never found it so difficult to submit before, but after a moment's pause he obeyed.

"—Both you and I had best let that be ; but I wish you to know that it is no momentary feeling that has prompted the step I am about to take. I am acting after full and quiet consideration. My efforts have all been thwarted, my plans are all frustrated ; why should I continue to live ? The thought of voluntarily retiring from the field on which I have been beaten is not new to me ; I have pondered it over for many months, and late events have only hastened the execution of my resolution—not confirmed it.

"You, as far as I know, entered into relations with the Camorra from entirely disinterested motives—you desired the restoration of your old King, and, still more, of his Queen—the re-establishment, at any rate, of the kingdom of Naples—and the association seemed to you one of the most powerful agencies for effecting the changes you wished. I, too, should have hailed with gladness any movement which separated us from the Piedmontese and the Tuscans, above all, the

restoration of the Bourbons, who were always the poor man's friends. It seems but a little thing to-night to say I would have given my life for it; even when life seemed precious to me I would have done so; and yet, to tell the truth, it was never my chief end.

"I shall be dead when you read this—somehow I have always to remind myself of the fact—and so I may write to you as freely as you speak in the confessional. When I entered the service of the Camorra, I did so only with a view to personal advancement. I desired a moderate income, work that would suit me, and a considerable amount of personal freedom. All these the association offered, and you know I soon turned my own freedom into a position of command. For years I have enjoyed such a—shall I call it influence or authority?—as many kings and ministers might envy; but somehow I soon got tired of telling people 'You must do this to-day, and that to-morrow.' And then I was constantly brought into contact with the misery of the lower classes, a misery that only those who have seen it with their own eyes, and touched it with their own hands, can conceive, and which has certainly grown greater day by day, ever since I have known it—ever since the union of Italy, you will say. It may be so. I cannot tell.

"I had from my earliest childhood a loathing for criminals, which has never left me, and, when I entered the service of the Camorra, the only part of my duties which was entirely distasteful to me was the necessity of associating with them; but by degrees I discovered that crime is the natural outcome of wretchedness, and that housebreakers, harlots, and pickpockets have often warmer hearts and a truer and more active compassion than the *galant-uomini*, who strut up and down the Villa with polished boots, tightly fitting gloves, and a camellia in their buttonholes, whose talk is all sentimentalism and

liberalism ; who are so thoroughly honest, they would not steal a rope to save a drowning man, and so respectable and economical that they would not give five lire more than is absolutely necessary to prevent a scandal to save the girl they have seduced from the stews. You know I do not hold your creed—my death shows the seriousness of my disbelief—but I quite understand the principle on which your Saviour chose His company ; and I have often thought, in the midst of the wildest and most abandoned society, that if He could really stand in our midst, and say in a tone that would command our confidence, ‘Come, all ye weary and heavy-laden,’ I should not be the only, or even the first, one that would cast himself at His feet. Somehow, the more one sees of the wretchedness of men, the more one begins to feel what such a Saviour might be. Ah, me ! if only His priests had been what they themselves say He was ! I do not wish to blame them ; they have suffered more than enough for faults they shared with those who now crow over them, and they, at least, were never hard to the poor, or harsh to those whom misery had led into sin—but, if they had only practised what they taught, all the schoolmasters and penny-a-liners in Italy would not have enabled Garibaldi and his horde to set foot on the soil of our country.

“I do not know how it was I began to feel all this. It came slowly, gradually, to me. I think it was pity for this and that single case which I knew I was powerless really to help that touched me first, and slowly grew into indignation and then despair ; but, the further one looked, the more one saw. And all these men and women had the same senses and feelings as I had ; they were perishing, and there was no one to help them.

“I remember very well how the first ray of hope came to me. I had been in one of the most dismal

of the *fondaci*, one of the worst sinks of filth and disease, of vice and wretchedness, that even our city could show. And yet I did not feel sad that evening. When one first visits such places one is conscious only of their fetid odours, one sees nothing but the ugliness and the misery; but, when one becomes more accustomed to them, one begins to see something else as well. Is it not strange that any spark of goodness can remain unquenched in such surroundings? And yet, how much of it there is! what courage, what constancy, what readiness to make the most of a little pleasure, and to bear deprivation with cheerfulness! Why, even those who are reduced to a condition which seems almost beyond human endurance will endeavour to make a jest of their misery, and there is no bitterness in their laughter. And then, how parents cling to their children, and children to their parents! How ready they are to share the refuse they have gathered from the dirt of the streets with each other, when the whole loathsome family meal would not satisfy the hunger of one! But what amazes me most is the compassion these outcasts show to those who have no claim upon them but a common humanity and a common wickedness. It seems as if none were so destitute as to be unable, now and then, to do an act of charity, none so weak that he might not, at times, be helpful. I had seen proof of all these things that day, and, as I walked up and down the Villa in the fading light, I felt proud that these men and women were my fellow-countrymen. And then suddenly a thought struck me. I held in my hand the means of organising all these virtues, and thus, by degrees, of doing away with all this misery. That was the happiest hour of my life. It was a dream from which I have now awakened.

“And yet, only two years ago, it seemed so nearly being realised. So much had been done, and what



remained was so plain and easy. You see, I had no intention of diverting the association from its primary purposes. Nay, if my scheme had succeeded, all its legitimate ends would have been attained without difficulty. Even as it is, I appeal to you, who know whether the Camorra was ever so powerful as it has been since a great part of the management has been left in my hands. Little has been said about it, but its influence has been felt everywhere; and this has been done in the teeth of a hostile government, who have filled the city with northern officials, and, all the time, crime has been systematically discouraged, and the wilder elements of the association reduced to something like order. When I am gone, you will hear a great deal more about the Camorra; people will say it has suddenly revived; but the more it is talked about, the weaker it will become.

"I have surely given proof enough of my desire to further all the original aims of the association; but I must confess that it was my desire to make it something that it had never been before, a league of all true Neapolitans against foreign manners and influences, a vast secret society for the protection of the rights and interests of the poor. And surely the time demands some such organisation. What have we to do with the fops and shop-keepers whom the political changes of late years have made our rulers, who would be cast from their places in a day if the two Sicilies were once more independent? Their habits, their feelings and their interests are different from ours; they have no pity for our need; in fact, they are the worst of our enemies, and they are only powerful because we are disunited. How different the old nobility were, and still are! They are our born friends and natural leaders, and their vast charities show that they do not look upon the tie that unites them to us as broken. It is natural that they should shrink from an association which still

contains robbers and murderers in its ranks ; but I had planned many changes, some of which have been effected, and I dreamed of a time when they might join us, and then we should have been invincible.

" But why should I talk of schemes that have been frustrated? Even if I had time to explain them fully, no one but myself could execute them. Somehow I feel as if I must speak of these things before I leave you, and, besides, I want you to know what it was that drew me, a freethinker, to you, dear Don Giacomo, and your clerical friends.

" Don Diodato would say that my plans were wrong from the beginning, that I ought not to have made use of crime, even to attain the holiest end ; that the blessing of God could not rest on a project that was baptised with sin. A year ago I should have smiled at such words : to-night, I am not so sure that he is wrong.

" Yet, what could I do but seize the weapons that lay nearest to my hand, when the need was so great? Was I a better man in my youth, when I scrupulously observed the letter of the law, and did not care a pin's head for any one but myself? I hardly think so. But now I loathe the weapons I have used, and that have broken in my hand. I cast them and my life away together, and, as I have already said, I am not following a sudden impulse, but carrying out a resolution that has been ripening for months, in doing so.

" Our masters have resolved to turn the engine I have carefully constructed for the deliverance of the people into a means for their oppression. You know the agent they sent me—a man who loves nothing in the world but his political party, and looks upon that only as a means of his own advancement. I foiled him, but I am powerless against them ; it may even be that they have already sold me."

(I here omit an account of the events already known



to the reader. It was carefully guarded, and contained the mention of no name.)

"You may be curious to know what induced me to choose the strange manner of death I have selected. I wished to have some conversation with the person who will bring you a report of it, and, as I found a difficulty in doing so, I hit upon this way of meeting him. On consideration, too, I found that the plan offered many advantages, as it is desirable that no one but he and you should know: I am dead—at least for the present. As, however, it is just possible that, in spite of all my precautions, the police may get wind of the matter, and attempt to annoy the fisherman, I enclose—envelope No. 3—a paper in which I state it is my intention to commit suicide in such and such a way, and to impose silence upon him by the threat of a dead man's curse. In case of any difficulty of this kind arising, you will at once release him, in my name, from the oath of silence which I imposed on him."

The writer went on to say that, after the packet had been placed in Don Giacomo's hand, he had remembered one or two affairs which he wished to be settled. They were all matters of no general interest, and the other enclosures referred to them. The paper concluded as follows:—

"As my watch is a little out of order, I have given it to a watchmaker to repair, with orders that he is to leave it at your house on Wednesday morning. The man, by the by, has been paid. Attached to the silk guard you will find a ring, which once belonged to my father. I shall feel obliged if you will wear it for my sake. The watch I should like you to give to Peppiniello on his next saint's day. You can tell him I sent it him without letting him know that I am dead. I do not know why my thoughts cling so closely to the boy in these my last hours. It is true he once saved me from a fate similar to that which

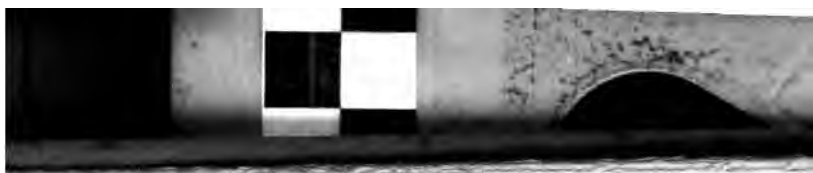
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again threatens me ; but I do not think that is it. It was a great thing, too, that he should take the motherless girl under his protection, when it was so difficult for him to fend for himself. I should not have done as much at his age—but then, others have done more. Perhaps, after all, it is because he is the only child who, during my whole life, has shown me the warm, reverent affection that children alone can give—because I know I have been of use to him already, and I can help him still. I do not think that he will forget me.

“It is with the fullest confidence I leave him to your care. I know you will do your best for him, for his own sake as well as for mine ; let me only entreat you to exert all your influence to prevent his entering the service of the Camorra.

“But it is not only as a sacred charge, but as the best of legacies, I leave him to you. At times I have felt almost jealous to see how fully you have gained his heart ; yet I have kept out of the way in order that it might be so. You can perhaps hardly imagine how lonely I feel at times. Shall I see him again before I die, I wonder—it does not much matter, after all.”

There was no signature. The other packet contained 5,875 lire in Italian bank-notes and two papers. The first of these stated that the enclosed sum was the whole property of which Don Antonio was possessed. He had never invested his money, as he had wished to have it by him in any case of emergency. He now placed it in his friend's hands, and desired him to employ it as follows. Don Antonio believed that the only debt he owed was for the wine he had received from Don Giacomo ; that must, of course, be paid first of all. (Don Giacomo here gave an angry snort.) On the enclosed paper would be found a list of the persons to whom Don Antonio had been accustomed to distribute regular alms. He wished



these to be continued. Most of them might receive the small sum marked on the margin weekly ; but those whose names were accompanied by a cross were so improvident that they would spend the money as soon as they had it ; it would be better therefore, if possible, to give it them in daily doles. The rest of the money Don Giacomo was to invest or employ as he thought best for the benefit of Peppiniello ; but it would be better not to let the boy know of this access of fortune at present, lest he should become extravagant, and grow less industrious and respectful than he had hitherto been.

"You see, you oughtn't to have read the papers, after all," said Don Giacomo, shaking his head, and smiling rather sadly.

"You shall never regret that I have done so," replied Peppiniello, very earnestly. "I do not think I shall ever be merry again—not in the old way, that is. And yet I am glad that I know all the truth. It makes me feel still and solemn, as I sometimes do at Mass." The boy paused ; he seemed to be looking far out over the bay ; his eyes were too full of tears to notice the quiet glow of the after-sunset light ; yet he felt its power. At length he resumed, in a low, broken voice,—“I feel as if it would be easier to be good now that I know he loved me and trusted me. But, Don Giacomo, there is one thing I wish you would let me do.”

"What is it?" asked the elder man, whose eyes were also full of tears.

"This money—I should like to take it to the poor people myself. It would seem as if I were doing something for him. I would say, of course, that it came from you."

"No, my boy, you must tell them it comes from him, that he has asked me to distribute it for him, and that I have entrusted the task to you."

"May I go back to-morrow and begin? It is so

sad that they should be in want while we have the money that belongs to them in our hands."

"Peppiniello," rejoined the master, laying his hand on the boy's, "you know Don Antonio wished his death to be kept a secret. If you were to return home now, would you be able to hide your sorrow from my wife and your sisters?"

"I think I could manage it—and yet I don't know—perhaps it's wisest not to try."

"Well, then, I will go to-morrow and settle all these things. I shall be back in the evening, and I promise you that as soon as you are in Naples they shall be your charge."

It was arranged so. The wine merchant took envelope No. 5 with him. On opening it he found it contained nothing but two names written on a slip of paper. Don Diodato told him they were those of Pesce Cane and Don Giorgio. As soon as he was again alone he burnt the document.

Don Giacomo had laid his plans rather cleverly. He had intended to keep Peppiniello in Meta till Sunday evening, and then to return to Naples with him. In that case they would only have met the rest of the family for an hour or two, and in the confusion of moving it was not likely that any one would observe very closely. But he had made his reckoning without his host, or at least his wife. That good woman insisted that she needed the youth's help in a hundred different ways, and, as he seemed entirely to have regained his self-possession, the wine-dealer assented to his request to return to Naples on Saturday evening.

Peppiniello did his best to behave bravely; he seemed busier, and certainly laughed more loudly, than usual; he was always ready at his mistress's beck and call, for it was an understood thing that during these few days he should be entirely at her disposal. And yet, all the time, he had a dreary

feeling that the life around him was not real, but only make-believe, and he was glad when he found himself alone of an evening, and could abandon himself to his melancholy reflections. Don Giacomo had foreseen this, and as nothing could induce him to expose himself to the turmoil and discomfort of moving, he had given the boy the key of his private room, with full permission to take refuge there as often as he wished. So on Monday evening, when all the work seemed really done, Peppiniello stole away and flung himself into his master's easy chair. In a moment more Mariannina stole into the room. As soon as he saw her the boy sprang up and exclaimed :

"What are you doing here, little gadabout?"

"No, I don't want to play, I want to talk ; sit down and take me on your knee."

He obeyed, and she stroked his chin as she had been used to do in the old nights when he came late to bed. It surprised him ; for it was a long time since she had caressed him thus.

"Now tell me why you are so sad."

"I am not sad, Nannina."

"Are you angry with me then?"

"No."

"If you are not angry with me I am sure you are sad."

"Why?"

"I can't tell why, but I am sure of it. As soon as you sit still your eyes and your lips look different from what they used to do, and when you kiss me you seem to be thinking of something else."

The boy folded his arms round the child.

"Yes, I am sad, Nannina ; but you must not tell any one, and I cannot tell you why it is."

They wept silently together ; but at last the girl said :—

"We have had a good cry ; but we must stop now and go down and wash our eyes, or they will see they

are red. I will wash yours for you, and you shall wash mine, and then they will think it was only a bit of fun."

When Don Giorgio left the court of justice he was a ruined man. In spite of his acquittal, nobody seemed to believe in his innocence; all his former companions either received him with the greatest coldness, or gave him the cut direct. Most of them were glad of any excuse that would free them from society they had long felt to be irksome, and even those who from interested motives had formerly pushed him were obliged to confess that their plan had failed, and consequently let him fall. As the attentions of his former associates diminished, those of his creditors became more pressing, and the only support or comfort that he found was in those who had directly employed him. They, it is true, had no further need for his services; but they were desirous to avoid a scandal and to get rid of a monument of their failure. After some consideration they consequently resolved to settle his affairs for him, and to supply him with a few hundred lire, in the firm conviction that his chief wish must be to leave the city as soon as possible.

In this, however, they were mistaken. When the social distinction he had lately enjoyed and the hopes he had founded upon it vanished like a dream, Don Giorgio's mind re-assumed its hold on the scheme that first brought him to Naples with a greater tenacity than ever. He longed to reappear in the brilliant circle in which he had moved, and to dazzle the eyes of those who had deserted him in his need by a wealth superior to their own, and, if he could only gain possession of his father's hidden treasure, which was his by right, this, he told himself, might easily be done. He had no great difficulty in discovering the name of the policeman who had taken the chief part

in the arrest of his father, and he was glad to find that he now occupied a position of some influence, and that he himself had met him several times. He at once called upon him, and opened the matter with what he considered a good deal of diplomatic skill. He had reason, he said, to believe that a convict, Carlo Irace by name, had died in possession of considerable wealth, and that a Camorrist who was generally known as Pesce Cane had laid his hands upon it. Now, he believed he should be able to show that he was the nearest heir, and, if it were necessary, he should be prepared to do so in a legal way ; but on many grounds he should prefer the matter to be settled quietly, and he was ready, in case of success, amply to reward any one who rendered him assistance.

Before he had finished speaking the official had taken the intellectual measure of his visitor, but he had his own reasons for drawing him out ; so, after a lengthened conversation, he said his memory of the case was rather indistinct, but he would go through all the papers connected with it, and, if Don Giorgio would call again in a few days' time, he would furnish him with every information in his power.

A review of the documents confirmed the official's old conviction that Don Carlo had possessed a hidden hoard of considerable value ; but he was even more strongly persuaded that it had never passed into Pesce Cane's hands, for, in that case, a share would have been sure to find its way into his own pocket, as, with all his faults, the Camorrist was known to be scrupulously honourable in affairs of this kind. It would be better to talk the matter over with him, as the appearance of this new claimant might have a personal interest for him.

It was thus that matters stood on the evening of Don Antonio's death, and the following night had been appointed for the admission of a number of

Giovani Onorati into the association. Such solemn meetings were by no means so easily held as they used to be under the Bourbons, and of late the police had been more than usually on the alert ; so it had been resolved that the ceremony should be performed in an empty house outside the town. Only the two *Capi* to whom the arrangements had been entrusted knew the exact spot. The company were to meet at a *trattoria* in Camaldolilli shortly after dark, and then to be led to their destination. Don Giorgio had heard some whisper of the matter. He knew that Pesce Cane loved these wild trials of courage, strength, and agility, and never missed one when it was at all possible for him to be present ; so he resolved that he also would be near. He was in the village long before the appointed time, and, as he did not dare to enter the house, he lurked about it outside.

Party after party arrived. He glanced through a back window and saw that the room was full of men who were sitting and drinking together, and—there was Pesce Cane. He shrank back into the darkness. They made but very little noise for so large a company, but at last there was a stir. Yes, they were rising to go ; he slipped round to the other side of the house, and posted himself on the road that leads to Camaldolilli in the expectation that they would take another way, in which case he would be able to follow them at a safe distance. No, they were turning in his direction. He hastened on, keeping a sharp look-out on both sides of the way for some place in which he could conceal himself till they had passed.

At last he found one. Just opposite the Torre di Camaldolilli, the old building which looks so picturesque from every part of the neighbourhood except the road immediately below it, where the narrowness of the side and the two new stone supports make the

whole edifice appear a single ill-proportioned tower, there is an excavation in the rock on the left side of the way, which has been worn down to a level considerably lower than that of the adjacent fields on either side. I do not know why the hole was made ; probably it was only for the stone that was taken from it, as the tuff here seems tolerably firm and good. The opening has a vaulted roof, and looks like a roomy stable, but it can never have been used for this purpose, as the floor is considerably lower than the road, and, if it had been meant for a cellar, it would certainly have been furnished with a door. As it is, it is only separated from the highway by a dry wall of about three feet high, and on the inside there are two foot-holes scooped into the rock, so that it is easy to climb up and down. The place has long been a puzzle to me. If it was only an infantine quarry, why did the workmen finish the roof, floor, and sides so carefully? And yet what else could it have been intended for?

Don Giorgio did not pause to ask such questions. He saw his opportunity, and at once sprang over the wall. As he had not expected that the ground would be lower on the inside than the outside, he was considerably shaken, but not severely hurt. He soon found the steps, and was thus able to see as much of what passed on the road as the darkness would permit.

The Camorrists were approaching now ; he could distinctly hear them ; but, when they had reached the point almost exactly opposite his hiding place, a word of command was given, and they suddenly paused.

"What does a traitor deserve?" asked a rough voice.

"Death!" replied the *Giovani Onorati* in solemn chorus.

"And what do you say, Pesce Cane?"

"Why, death of course," replied Domenico in an

indifferent tone. In another moment three knives were plunged into his body. He had no time to defend himself; he reeled and fell. All the men drew back, and a sudden silence ensued. They did not repent of what they had done. They were perfectly ready to close in again upon him if it should prove to be necessary, and yet a certain awe overcame them. There were but few there who had not been associated with Pesce Cane in some wild and lawless deed; still fewer who did not remember a time when they had looked up to him or his father with admiring devotion; and now he lay there. For a time he was perfectly still; then a thrill seemed to pass through his limbs, and he moved as if he wished to rise. One of the more pitying of his executioners sat down behind him, lifted the body a little, and let the head rest upon his knees. His breathing was hard; the eyes began to fix themselves; it seemed as if nothing more would happen till all was over; when suddenly Domenico stretched out his arms, called in a wild, broken voice, "Margherita! Margherita!" and fell back dead. None of those who were standing round him understood the meaning of his dying cry, nor can I tell whether the harsh voice was so tremulous with the sudden joy of an unexpected meeting, or with the despair of an eternal farewell.

As soon as they were sure he was dead, the Camorrista dispersed. The only words Don Giorgio caught came from two of the leaders:—

"There is the other job, you know."

"Yes, but that can be done easily enough."

He waited a long time before he ventured to creep from his hole and kneel beside the dead body. He had not known how much he had feared Pesce Cane until he felt his heart quicken at the thought that all danger was removed; how much he hated him, till he could strike his cheek and spit in his face with safety. He had to remind himself that it was not to satisfy

his revenge he was there, but to discover where his father's wealth was deposited. Then he began to rifle the dead man's pockets. He was thus engaged when he was suddenly seized by the collar. The police had suspected that the Camorristi intended to hold a meeting that evening, a band of *carabinieri* had been despatched to patrol the district, and it was into their hands Don Giorgio fell.

The rest of his story is easily told. He was charged with the murder of Domenico ; corroborative evidence of the strongest kind was forthcoming ; his own story was regarded as a stupid and impossible fiction ; he was found guilty and condemned to death. It was almost a matter of course that this sentence was commuted to one of imprisonment with hard labour for life ; but this act of royal mercy excited no enthusiasm in Naples, and it was but of small use to Don Giorgio. He was not a man to make friends, and all the friends of Pesce Cane and Don Antonio were united against him. His gaolers and fellow-prisoners vied with each other in tormenting and making game of him ; all day long he had not a moment's quiet : of all the wretched band that now made up his world, he alone could hope for neither justice nor pity. He soon broke down under the treatment, and died before the winter was far advanced.

One afternoon Don Giacomo called Peppiniello into his private room. "You may sleep quietly now, my boy," he said : "the two names on the paper I would not let you read were those of Pesce Cane and Don Giorgio. The first was killed on the evening after Don Antonio's death, and the second died in prison two nights ago."

THE END.

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14





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